

Digressions in Classical Historiography

Digital Conference, Hosted by the University of the Peloponnese

ZOOM-Link: please, contact Professor Vasileios Liotsakis

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**Saturday,
26/09/2020**

Presentation	Local times			
	US (EST)	UK	Spain/ Germ./ Netherl.	GR
Opening remarks: Andreas Markantonatos (University of the Peloponnese)	9:15 - 9:30	14:15 - 14:30	15:15 - 15:30	16:15 - 16:30
Panel 1: 5th-4th cent BCE				
Ioannis M. Konstantakos (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens): Digressive Anecdotes, Narrative Excursus, and Historical Thought in Herodotus	9:30 - 10:00	14:30 - 15:00	15:30 - 16:00	16:30 - 17:00
Vassiliki Pothou (Former University of Kiel / University of Regensburg): "I Have Written about It and Have Made This Digression from My Account...": Thucydides' Digression (ἐκβολή) and The Unity of His Work	10:00 - 10:30	15:00 - 15:30	16:00 - 16:30	17:00 - 17:30
Luuk Huitink (University of Amsterdam): "Since I Have Now Started To Tell The Story": Some Peculiar Digressive Techniques in Xenophon	10:30 - 11:00	15:30 - 16:00	16:30 - 17:00	17:30 - 18:00
Coffee/lunch/dinner break	11:00 - 12:00	16:00 - 17:00	17:00 - 18:00	18:00 - 19:00
Panel 2: Hellenistic Era				
Antonio Ignacio Molina Marín (University of Murcia): Emulating Herodotus: Digressions in The First Generation of Alexander Historians	12:00 - 12:30	17:00 - 17:30	18:00 - 18:30	19:00 - 19:30
Lisa Irene Hau (University of Glasgow): Digressions as a Moral-Didactic Tool in Polybius	12:30 - 13:00	17:30 - 18:00	18:30 - 19:00	19:30 - 20:00
Mario Baumann (Giessen University): Digressions and Universal History: The Case of Diodorus Siculus	13:00 - 13:30	18:00 - 18:30	19:00 - 19:30	20:00 - 20:30

Sunday, 27/09/2020

Presentation	Local times			
	US (EST)	UK	Spain/ Germ./ Netherl.	GR
Panel 3: Late Republican and Imperial Rome				
Edwin Shaw (University of Bristol): Pluralities of Truth in Sallust's Digressions	9:30 - 10:00	14:30 - 15:00	15:30 - 16:00	16:30 - 17:00
Christina Kraus (Yale University): Going in Circles: Digressive Behavior in Caesar, BC 2.23-44	10:00 - 10:30	15:00 - 15:30	16:00 - 16:30	17:00 - 17:30
Vasileios Liotsakis (University of the Peloponnese): Digressions as Narrative Milestones in Arrian's Anabasis of Alexander	10:30 - 11:00	15:30 - 16:00	16:30 - 17:00	17:30 - 18:00
Kyle Khellaf (University of California, Riverside): Inglorious History from the Confines of Empire: The Tacitean Digression	11:00 - 11:30	16:00 - 16:30	17:00 - 17:30	18:00 - 18:30
Closing remarks	11:30 - 11:50	16:30 - 16:50	17:30 - 17:50	18:30 - 18:50

ABSTRACTS

Digressive Anecdotes, Narrative Excursus, and Historical Thought in Herodotus

Ioannis M. Konstantakos
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

Next to Apuleius, De Quincey, Robert Burton, Milorad Pavić, and Salman Rushdie, Herodotus is one of the most digressive writers in world literature. One of his favourite types of digression is the short narrative excursus, an anecdote or brief historical legend that is inserted, in an occasional and associative manner, into a broader storyline of different thematic content and constitutes a temporary deviation from the main stream of the narrative. Such digressive tales are not to be attributed solely to Herodotus' *Erzählfreude* and his will to preserve every memorable story he collected in the course of his long researches. Many of them are connected with important recurrent themes and thought patterns of Herodotus' *oeuvre*, such as the irruption of the marvellous into ordinary human existence, the confrontation between power and wisdom, or the unexpected verification of predictions.

Above all, the most enthralling of these narrative deviations encapsulate in a graphic manner a significant finding of Herodotus' research, an argument or an idea that is central to the author's anthropological worldview or to his exposition of historical experience. The digressive anecdotes look back and forward to important episodes of Herodotus' main narrative, echo characteristic statements of the author's philosophy of history, and thus serve as connective links within an intricate network of historical thought. In the most successful cases, these tales schematize and illustrate deeper forces which underlie the development of the historical process and regulate the course of human societies. They give aesthetic form to basic laws which, in Herodotus' mind, determine the condition of humanity.

This function of narrative digressions will be analyzed through the examination of a series of examples from Herodotus' work. Thrasybulus' riddling advice to Periander (5.92ζ-η) highlights the tyrannical structure of the cosmos and simultaneously reveals the hubristic desire of the powerful to replicate the cosmic order to which they are themselves subject. The confrontation of Greeks and Indians before King Darius (3.38.3-4) may be read in parallel with other celebrated disputes of the Herodotean narrative (e.g. Solon and Croesus, Cambyses and the Ethiopian ruler) and points to the impossibility of mutual understanding between different cultures as the prime mover of history. The final digression of the entire work, Cyrus' dialogue with Artembares (9.122), looks back to the very beginning of the Persians' rise to world power; offering a suitable epilogue to this most digressive of compositions, it establishes the alternation of dominion and decline in the life of nations – a demonstration of Herodotus' capital axiom about the circularity of history.

“I Have Written about It and Have Made This Digression from My Account...”: Thucydides' Digression (ἐκβολή) and The Unity of His Work

Vasiliki Pothou

Former University of Kiel / University of Regensburg

The creation of Thucydides' digressions is a multifaceted subject, which links to the historiographical tradition of logographers, to the procedures used for mitigating the semantic deficiencies and to a personal preoccupation of the author. The historian was fully aware of the distinction between the main storyline and the narrative sections of digression. He was innovative in as far as he implemented some issues to the thematic of digressions, which had not been previously addressed by his predecessors. Thucydides aimed at highlighting the distinction between his own method and those of his predecessors. For this reason, he did not allow himself narrative pieces of digression, which might remind his readers of his predecessors, especially his great master Herodotus. However, the originality of Thucydides' digressions was not exclusively due to their function or content. He knew very well how and why he used his digressional material and he wanted to demonstrate it ostentatiously. The assimilation and the literary incorporation of digressions into the main storyline establish his pioneering spirit. He aimed at justifying the existence of his digressions and at inserting them skillfully in the main

narration as a unifying account. We might speak of narrative maturity. We are dealing with the issue of the unity of his work and of its Ionian influence. Nonetheless, we should also contemplate the scientific concern of the historian, his innovative spirit and his literary talent. Therefore Thucydides' digressions play an increasingly fundamental role; they are not a pleasure, but a necessity.

'Since I Have Now Started To Tell The Story': Some Peculiar Digressive Techniques in Xenophon

Luuk Huitink
University of Amsterdam

Broadly (and not unproblematically) speaking, from a narratological perspective a digression can be defined as a temporary shift in the time, space and/or participants in a narrative (where time has traditionally been given most weight). Such a definition is relatively straightforward for a largely linear narrative like *Anabasis* (and its only true 'excursus', on Scyllus at 5.3.7ff.). But it is more problematic in the case of narratives like Herodotus' *Histories*, which so often changes focus that some scholars prefer to speak about the work's overall 'anachronical' structure rather than discern endless 'digressions'. At first sight, *Hellenica* is similar. This narrative, too, has multiple focal points and often changes tack, and, like Herodotus, Xenophon tends to establish links between the 'main' narrative and the 'digressions' (as when Euphron of Sicyon appears as a commander in an expedition to Phleious at 7.2.11) and to relate 'digressive' material in multiple installments (Euphron at 7.2.11-15, 3.2-4.1). However, in contrast to Herodotus, Xenophon's transitions between story lines turn out to be (deliberately) less smooth than they seem at first, and after a digression has 'emerged' from the main narrative he at some points tends emphatically to mark them *as* digressions. My paper will consider what narrative possibilities these techniques afford Xenophon and what they say about his view of history. I will also briefly look at *Cyropaedia*, which has such prominent digressions that they are often called 'novellas'. That term adumbrates a further way in which Xenophon marks out digressions, namely by adopting different 'styles' or, better, 'narrative frames'; the clearest case is the way the Panthea and Abradatas story is anchored in epic, offering glimpses of a universe in which things operate very differently than in the narrative world in which Cyrus operates.

Emulating Herodotus: Digressions in The First Generation of Alexander Historians

Antonio Ignacio Molina Marín
University of Murcia

During the last years, most of the scholars have written about the readings of Alexander the Great. One of these authors was Herodotus of Halicarnassus. The so-called "father of history" played an important role in the history of Macedonia, given that he was the person in charge of introducing the Old Kingdom to the Greeks. The main purpose of this paper is to propose a new

form of analyzing the relationship between Alexander historians and Herodotus through the study of the use of digressions by the first generation of these authors. It is known that Theopompus of Chios made an epitome of the Histories of Herodotus. Callisthenes' influence on the rest of the Alexander historians was immense, and through him, most of these authors continued with the same Herodotean topics. Thus, we can see identical motifs in their works: the sources of the Nile, elephants, gold ants, etc. There are also many parallels between Herodotus and Hieronymus of Cardia in their descriptions of Scythians and Nabateans. Therefore, it is not an overstatement to say that because of the Macedonian conquest of Asia, Herodotus's fame extended throughout the Hellenistic age.

Digressions as a Moral-Didactic Tool in Polybius

Lisa Irene Hau
University of Glasgow

Polybius' *Histories* has more pauses in the narrative of events than any other preserved Classical or Hellenistic work of history. In these narrative pauses, the narrator communicates directly with the narratee providing a much fuller commentary on the events and his own treatment of them than is offered by any other historiographical narrator of the period. A large number of these passages deal with the practice and purpose of writing history, and they provide us with a unique insight into the plan behind the work. Striking in these programmatic passages is the repeated insistence on the usefulness of the *Histories* to its readers. In this paper, we shall examine Polybius' digressions in order to determine in what way(s) the historian thought they contributed to the intended usefulness of the *Histories*. We shall see that, although the digressions are occasioned by different needs arising from the surrounding narrative – i.e. they can be explanative, evaluative, or philosophical – most of them have a double didactic purpose and are intended to be both practically and morally useful.

Digressions and Universal History: The Case of Diodorus Siculus

Mario Baumann
University of Giessen

Diodorus' *Bibliothēke* is a universal history in the most radical sense of the word: It covers the whole history from the beginning of mankind to Diodorus' own time, while its geographic scope spans the entire oecumene. These characteristics make the *Bibliothēke* an interesting test case for any definition of 'digression'. Concepts like 'geographical' or 'ethnographical digressions' hardly work for the *Bibliothēke*, and even narratological definitions which refer to shifts in the time of a narrative are difficult to apply, given the *Bibliothēke*'s 'universal' temporality which goes well beyond linear chronological narrative. My paper will thus focus on cases where the Diodorean narrator expressly marks a passage as a deviation from the course of his narrative, especially on Diod. 12.12–20, a detailed account of the Greek

lawgivers Charondas and Zaleucus inserted by the narrator into his story of the foundation of Thurii. These chapters exemplify the multiple functions of digressions in the *Bibliothēke*: They are narrative intersections which crosslink different parts of the *Bibliothēke*, inviting (and enabling) the readers to learn from Diodorus' universal history; they tell a captivating story which entertains the readers; and they self-referentially highlight key aspects of the *Bibliothēke*'s 'bookishness' (cf. Charondas' law about free education in reading and writing and the narrator's subsequent eulogy of the γραμματική, Diod. 12.12–13).

Pluralities of Truth in Sallust's Digressions

Edwin Shaw
University of Bristol

Digressions play an important role in Sallust's works, offering an opportunity to expand the boundaries of his tightly circumscribed narratives (for example by extending his historical compass both forwards and backwards); Sallust uses digressions to fill in the wider context for the episodes he covers in detail, giving them a distinct textual status. However, in this paper I will focus on a different sense in which digressions expand the usual bounds of Sallust's historiography: building on recent work on the variability and plurality of historiographical modes of truth (particularly Ruffell & Hau 2017), in this paper I suggest that the digressions represent moments where Sallust can deviate from the prevailing model of historiographical truthfulness which applies throughout the rest of his works. While his historical narratives make claims to truthfulness based on the contemporaneity of their subject-matter and the author's privileged position, the digressions are passages at which these claims are relaxed, and a more free model of historiographical truth can apply. As such, the digressions represent points of expansion of the historiographical narrative in methodological and stylistic terms, as well as narrative ones.

Going in Circles: Digressive Behavior in Caesar, *BC* 2.23-44

Christina Kraus
Yale University

The narrative of Curio's exploits and eventual defeat near Utica features a strange topographical notation: *abest [sc. locus peridoneus castris] directo itinere ab Utica paulo amplius passuum milibus III. sed hoc itinere est fons, quo mare succedit longius, lateque is locus restagnat; quem si qui vitare voluerit, sex milium circuitu in oppidum pervenit* (2.24.4). In some ways this is no surprise. The geography of North Africa lends itself to roundabout and disorderly motion (Kraus 1999); in this story, which is itself a divergence both topographically (taking place on a separate continent from Books 1 and 3) and authorially (being experiences unwitnessed by Caesar) from the 'main' narrative of the *BC*, we can observe "digression" as an essential component of historiography. Here I concentrate on the first half of the narrative, 2.23.1

Eisdem temporibus C. Curio in Africam profectus through 37.6 *itaque omnium suorum consensu Curio reliquas copias exspectare et bellum ducere parabat*. Starting from the note that to get to Utica one has to “go around,” I note the abundant elements typical of historiographical digression: ships, numbers, *descriptiones loci*, ethnographical detail, *oratio recta* and *sententiae* (the rarity of which in Caesar are a marked departure from the *via directa* of his prose), anecdotes, and other interruptions. Temporal digressiveness is implied as well: the main action oscillates between locations marked by a look back to the second Punic war (the *castra Cornelia*) and ahead to the death of Cato Uticensis. Curio’s story has been well read as a ‘dramatic structure’ (appropriately enough, since Caesar singles out the presence of a *theatrum* outside Utica, 2.25.1; Rowe 1967). I hope to show, following Khellaf 2018, how this episode challenges the binaries of historiographical narrative, including the built environment and the natural, reported and direct speech, the straight and the circular.

Digressions as Narrative Milestones in Arrian’s *Anabasis of Alexander*

Vasileios Liotsakis
University of the Peloponnese

Arrian’s *Anabasis of Alexander* is marked by the frugality with which its author uses digressions. Although Arrian found in his sources, the first historians of Alexander, a great amount of ethnographic and geographical material about the areas visited by Alexander, he chose to confine the number of extensive excursuses on the peoples and the geographical physiognomies of Asian territories, focusing instead strictly on the military events and Alexander’s motives. However, the very few extensive digressions of the work have a significant role in its narrative arrangement, marking pivotal points both in the Macedonian enterprise in Asia and in the development of Alexander’s character. This paper examines the ways in which Arrian used the few digressions of his work as narrative milestones, namely as markers of the most important phases of Alexander’s expedition.

Inglorious History from the Confines of Empire: The Tacitean Digression

Kyle Khellaf
University of California, Riverside

This paper examines the Tacitean digression both in relation to previous models of digressive narratology (namely Polybius and Livy), and in response to the political changes brought about by the Roman principate. I contend that many of the seemingly paradoxographical digressions—or pseudo-digressions, when employed within the “annalistic” framework of Tacitus’ *opera maiora*—offer the reader an additional lens through which to view Tacitean ambiguity and pessimism as key elements in his critique of the Roman emperors. We should, I believe, take literally Tacitus’ digressive complaints about having to write

“inglorious” history from “within a narrow space” (*nobis in arto et inglorius labor*, *Ann.* 4.32.2)—unlike previous historians who “commemorated” events “with unchecked digression” (*libero egressu memorabant*, 4.32.1)—and view these comments as referring to both his restricted subject matter and the ways these necessitate digression. Thus, in addition to Tacitus’ discursive statements about his historiographical motives and methodology (*Ann.* 3.65, 4.32-33), particular attention will be paid to his recurring usage of digressions which employ carnivalesque, even subaltern voices that would otherwise find minimal expression in the primary narrative. Here, I focus especially on his accounts of the mutiny of the Usipi (*Agr.* 28), the imposter Nero (*Hist.* 2.8-9), and Clemens, the false Agrippa Postumus (*Ann.* 2.39-40). These afford Tacitus with new diegetic spaces for criticism, whereby the historian is further able to unmask the various failings of the Roman principate—essentially breaking through the endless veneer of imperial *recusatio*, and getting at the heart, or rather *ingenium*, of the Roman principate’s tenuous status as manifest in the frequently depicted “imposter syndrome” of its imperial actors.