

What is the history of translation of Herodotus in German?

The history of Herodotean translations in German is quite a long story. There are a great number of German translations—16 of the complete works of Herodotus, not counting translations of parts. This long story begins early in the 16th century, when Hieronymus Boner published *Von den Persier und vielen anderen Kriegen, aus dem Lateinischen übersetzt von Hieronymus Boner* (Augsburg 1535), drawing on the famous and widely known Latin translation of Lorenzo Valla, first printed in 1474. Boner's translation of Herodotus is not easy to read or understand, being written (and spelled) in 16th century German. It is, however, quite an aesthetic pleasure to scroll through the [digital online version](#).

More than half a century later Georgius Schwartzkopff undertook the first translation directly from ancient Greek: *Herodoti des Aller Fürnembsten und ältesten Geschichtsschreibers Historia ... auß der Griechischen Spraach in die Teutsche gebracht* (Frankfurt am Main 1593). As can be guessed from the title, the spelling and the 16th century German make the translation difficult to read.

When more than 150 years later, Johann Eustachius Goldhagen translated Herodotus—there seems to be a long gap with no German translations in the 17th century—he made it obvious in his preface that he did not think much of Schwartzkopff's translation. He thought that it was rather obscure, and that Schwartzkopff had apparently used the Latin translation of Valla rather than—as claimed in the title—the original text. Goldhagen's translation *Des Herodotus neun Bücher der Geschichte; aus dem Griechischen übersetzt und mit einem Register, in welchem einige nöthige Erläuterungen mit eingeschaltet sind, versehen* (Lemgo 1756) was revised and republished in 1911 in two volumes by Heinrich Conrad and Hanns Floerke—both translators of literature, working for the publisher Georg Müller in Munich (Floerke was director of the publisher A. Langen/G. Müller).

Towards the end of the 18th century, two translations were published within a few years. One was by Johann Friedrich Degen, a classical scholar and teacher at a Gymnasium in Ansbach: *Herodots Geschichte. Aus dem Griechischen übersetzt von Johann Friedrich Degen* (Frankfurt am Main 1783-1791). The second was by someone who was not even a classicist, but a well-known medical person of the time, Carl Wigand Maximilian Jacobi. He is said to have translated Herodotus, Thucydides and Plato in order to earn money for his medical career!

The 19th century saw some important translations, which remained quite influential in the 20th century. In 1810-1813, the translation of Friedrich Heinrich Wilhelm Lange, teacher of classics and school-administrator in Berlin and Koblenz, written in a rather archaising style, was published in Breslau in two volumes: *Die Geschichten des Herodotus, übersetzt von Friedrich Lange* (Breslau 1810-1813, J. Max u. Co). A second edition was published in 1824. In 1885 (Leipzig Reclam) this translation was edited by Otto Güthling, a classical scholar well known for his dictionaries, and it was again edited and revised by Güthling in 1930. The language of Lange's translation is rather antiquated and in many parts imitates the German of the Luther Bible. The intention may be to convey the influence of Homeric language on the style of Herodotus. The translator Marg (see below), who regards Lange's translation as one of the best

translations of any Greek literature, points out, however, that Herodotus' language did not sound archaic to his contemporaries. J.M. Thesz sees the archaizing translation as a reflection of Lange's nationalist sentiments, and the choice of the text itself as an allegory for the political conflict between Germany and France (see [Matthias Widmer's review](#) on the contribution of Thesz in: Josefine Kitzbichler, Ulrike C. A. Stephan, *Studien zur Praxis der Übersetzung antiker Literatur: Geschichte - Analysen - Kritik. Transformationen der Antike*, 35. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016). As Lange follows strictly the original word order, the translation sometimes appears clumsy and difficult to understand. Another noticeable feature is the frequent use of the German past participle instead of the full verb form. Sounding concise and powerful, this may be another attempt to convey the Herodotean style. Lange's translation was soon followed by that of Adolf Schöll: *Griechische Prosaiker in neuen Übersetzungen, übersetzt von Adolf Schöll* (Stuttgart 1828-1832), revised in 1853. Schöll, who had given up his study of theology in Tübingen to pursue his interest in Greek literature and mythology, was acquainted with some of the most famous authors and poets of his time such as Gustav Schwab, Eduard Mörike and Joseph von Eichendorff. He became director of the art collection in Weimar and later director of the grand ducal library.

Shortly afterwards, in the years 1859–1864, there appeared the translation of Johann Christian Bähr: *Die Musen. Herodotus von Halikarnass, übersetzt von J.Chr.F.Bähr* (Stuttgart 1859). Bähr was a classical scholar and director of the university library in Heidelberg. He had previously edited the Greek text and used his own edition as the basis of his translation. The translation was reprinted several times, for instance in ²1861 (revised), 1868, 1898 and 1930. A revised and corrected version was published in Mainz, 2011: *corrected and revised* ³2011 *with an introduction by Lars M. Hoffmann marix Verlag Wiesbaden*. L. M. Hoffmann praises the reliability of Bähr's translation and its clear and sophisticated style. Another later translator of Herodotus, Eberhard Richtsteig, *Herodotos. Forschungen, übers. von E.Richtsteig*, (Limburg/Lahn 1954), makes special mention in his preface of Bähr's translation, which he found very helpful when writing his notes.

Only a few years after Bähr's first publication, there appeared a new translation by Heinrich Stein: *Die Geschichten des Herodot* (Oldenburg 1875). Heinrich Stein, a philologist and teacher at a Gymnasium in Berlin and later director of a Gymnasium in Oldenburg, had also previously edited the Greek text with a thorough commentary (1856). According to the later translator Marg (see below), who consulted Stein's translation when working on his own, Stein's text is very correct and exact, but lacks rhythm and tightness, the sentence structure is often stiff and awkward. More than a century later his translation was revised, supplemented and published by W.Stammler, Essen 1984.

There are even more translations of Herodotus in the 20th century – five altogether, some of which appeared in several editions. The first is that of August Horneffer, published in 1910: *Herodotos Historien. Deutsch von August Horneffer* (Leipzig 1910). Horneffer was well known not only for his translations (he also translated Thucydides), but also for his books on freemasonry, being a freemason himself. A new edition of his translation was made in 1955 by H.W. Haussig: *Herodotos Historien. Deutsche Gesamtausgabe, übersetzt von A. Horneffer; neu herausgegeben und erläutert von H.W. Haussig, mit einer Einleitung von W. Ott* (Stuttgart

1955). According to Günther Nesselrath (see below) Horneffer's translation is unreliable and his language antiquated.

Quite readable is the next translation in the series, that of Theodor Braun: *Das Geschichtswerk des Herodot von Halikarnassos aus dem Griechischen von Theodor Braun* (Leipzig 1927). However, this is a rather free rendering of the original Greek text. It is fluent and pleasant to read, but does not allow an exact understanding of the structure and wording of the Greek original text, nor does it try to convey Herodotus' style. Theodor Braun (1877-1946) was probably not a classical philologist at all, but a historian. He is listed as such in the 'Österreichisches Biographisches Lexikon', where his translation of Herodotus is not mentioned in the article. Several later editions appeared in 1931, 1956, 1958 and 1964. In 2001 it was issued as a paperback (Inselverlag). As there is a reference to the *English Patient* on the back cover, it might not be a coincidence that the book was published four years after the film was first shown in Germany in 1997.

Two decades after Braun's first edition another translation appeared, that of Eberhard Richtsteig, a philologist and teacher in Breslau: *Herodotos Forschungen, übersetzt von E. Richtsteig* (Limburg/Lahn 1953, in 6 volumes). It is a very reliable, exact translation close to the Greek original text. This was reprinted in 1961 (Munich, Goldmann Verlag paperback). The translator Feix (see below), who consulted various translations when working on his own, refers explicitly to his former teacher Richtsteig's translation and thanks him for his support and help. Marg (see below) also describes Richtsteig's translation as very close to the Greek text and as keeping the original word order. While he criticizes it as not sounding German and sometimes failing to convey a clear meaning, he nevertheless credits it with drawing attention to the characteristics of Herodotus' style. Marg too consulted Richtsteig's translation and in spite of what he had said before, found it useful, when trying to understand Herodotus' meaning.

The most widespread and most frequently cited translation is that of Josef Feix, published in 1963 and also containing the Greek text: *Herodot Historien, griechisch-deutsch, 2 Bde*, (München 1963, Heimeranverlag). Feix had studied and taught in Breslau before fleeing to West Germany after the Second World War. There are again various editions. In 2004 it was issued in one volume containing only the German translation. There is also a digitized version of the Greek with German translation. Despite its popularity, Feix's translation was criticized as not consistently following the style of Herodotus and as altering the original structure of sentences, thus causing problems of understanding (cf. Thesz, J.M., Thesz: *Deutsche Thukydidesübersetzungen vom 18. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert*. Berlin 2017, S. 201ff.). According to Feix himself (see his epilogue in volume II of the translation), his intention was to produce a readable translation which would convey the spirit of the author while following the original Greek very closely in order to allow a direct comparison with the original text.

In 1973, ten years after Feix had translated Herodotus, another very popular translation was made by Walter Marg, Professor of Greek Philology in Mainz. This was published in two volumes, the first containing books I-IV in 1973. The second volume containing books V-IX, published in 1983, could not be finished by Marg himself due to health problems and was therefore edited and completed by Gisela Strasburger with an essay by Hermann Strasburger,

Geschichte und Geschichten, übersetzt von Walter Marg, 2 volumes; BD 1, München, 1973; Bd 2 bearbeitet und vollendet von Gisela Strasburger (München 1983). Marg mentions in the preface to his translation that he first thought of making a new edition of Lange's translation but changed his mind when he realised that the results of more recent research on Herodotus were not compatible with that translation. Therefore he undertook a new one using Lange's wording and sentences where appropriate. As Marg neither follows the Herodotean word order nor uses an antiquated German, his translation is fluent and easy to read. According to Walter Nicolai, he combines philological reliability and artistic style in a masterly fashion (s.v. 'Marg, Walter' in: *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 16 (1990), S. 151-152).

The 21st century has so far seen two further translations of Herodotus, one by Günther Nesselrath, the other by Kai Brodersen and Christine Ley-Hutton.

The new translation by Günther Nesselrath (*Herodot Historien. Deutsche Gesamtausgabe, neu übersetzt, herausgegeben und erläutert von Heinz Günther Nesselrath* (Stuttgart 2017, KrönerVerlag), who is Professor of Greek Philology at the University of Göttingen, replaces that of Horneffer. In his preface Nesselrath explains how he came to produce a new translation: having been asked by the publisher to update Horneffer's translation by rewriting and actualizing the introduction and the notes, he soon realised that it was antiquated and unreliable and therefore had to be replaced. Nesselrath's translation is based on the new edition of the Greek text by N.G. Wilson 2015.

In 2019, a translation by Kai Brodersen, Professor of Ancient Culture at the University of Erfurt, and Christine Ley-Hutton, teacher of Classics in Munich, was published by Reclam: *Herodot Historien, übersetzt und herausgegeben von Kai Brodersen und Christine Ley-Hutton* (Stuttgart 2019). Preceding the publication of the complete translation of Herodotus in 2019, single volumes of books I-VII containing the Greek text were published between the years 2002 and 2016. Due to a change in the publisher's policy, the complete translation of books I-IX was published in one volume without the Greek text. For the Greek text, the new edition of N. G. Wilson was consulted. The original idea of the new Reclam translation including the Greek text, was to produce a translation as close as possible in structure and wording to the original Greek, which would allow the reader to follow the Greek in the German translation. At the same time, the translation is intended to be fluent and modern in style. Some special Greek terms like *agora*, *apoikia*, *barbaros*, *demos*, *eunomie*, which have no simple or unambiguous German equivalent are not translated, but appear in the text transcribed and are explained in a glossary. The translation is also available as an [e-book](#).