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Lucian's *True Histories*: Writing an *ἀληθή* Ethnography

1. Lucian, *Verae Historiae* 1.5

Ὀρμηθεὶς γὰρ ποτε ἀπὸ Ἡρακλείων στηλῶν καὶ ἀφείς εἰς τὸν ἑσπέριον ὠκεανὸν οὐρίῳ ἀνέμῳ τὸν πλοῦν ἐποιούμην. **αἰτία δέ μοι τῆς ἀποδημίας καὶ ὑπόθεσις ἡ τῆς διανοίας περιεργία καὶ πραγμάτων καινῶν ἐπιθυμία καὶ τὸ βούλεσθαι μαθεῖν τί τὸ τέλος ἐστὶν τοῦ ὠκεανοῦ καὶ τίνες οἱ πέραν κατοικοῦντες ἄνθρωποι.**

Once upon a time, setting out from the Pillars of Hercules and heading for the western ocean with a fair wind, I went a-voyaging. **The motive and purpose of my journey lay in my intellectual activity and desire for adventure, and in my wish to find out what the end of the ocean was, and who the people were that lived on the other side.**

2. Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* 7.2.32

Trogodytas super Aethiopiam velociores equis esse Pergamenus Crates, item Aethiopas octona cubita longitudine excedere; ... in Africae solitudinibus hominum species obviae subinde fiunt momentoque evanescent.

Crates of Pergamus states, that the Troglodytæ, who dwell beyond Æthiopia, are able to outrun the horse; and that a tribe of the Æthiopians, who are known as the Syrbotæ, exceed eight cubits in height.... In the deserts of Africa, men are frequently seen to all appearance, and then vanish in an instant

3. Lucian, *Verae Historiae* 1.8

τὸ μὲν γὰρ ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς, ὁ στέλεχος αὐτὸς εὐερνῆς καὶ παχύς, τὸ δὲ ἄνω γυναικὲς ἦσαν, ὅσον ἐκ τῶν λαγόνων ἅπαντα ἔχουσαι τέλεια.... καὶ μὴν καὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς ἐκόμων ἔλιξι τε καὶ φύλλοις καὶ βότρυσι. **προσελθόντας δὲ ἡμᾶς ἠσπάζοντό τε καὶ ἐδεξιοῦντο, αἱ μὲν Λύδιον, αἱ δ' Ἰνδικήν, αἱ πλεῖστα δὲ τὴν Ἑλλάδα φωνὴν προῖεμενα.**

The part which came out of the ground, the trunk itself, was stout and well-grown, but the upper part was in each case a woman, entirely perfect from the waist up.... Actually, the hair of their heads was tendrils and leaves and clusters! **When we came up, they welcomed and greeted us, some of them speaking Lydian, some Indian, but the most part Greek.**

4. Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* 6.36

penetravit in eas Hanno Poenorum imperator prodiditque hirta feminarum corpora, viros pernicitate evasisse; duarum Gorgadum cutes argumenti et miraculi gratia in Iunonis templo posuit, spectatas usque ad Carthaginem captam.

Hanno, a general of the Carthaginians, penetrated as far as these regions, and brought back an account that the bodies of the women were covered with hair, but that the men, through their swiftness of foot, made their escape; in proof of which singularity in their skin, and as evidence of a fact so miraculous, he placed the skins of two of these females in the temple of Juno, which were to be seen there until the capture of Carthage.

5. a. Lucian, *Verae Historiae* 1.12

(Φαέθων)—πολὸν ἤδη πρὸς ἡμᾶς πολεμεῖ χρόνον. ἤρξατο δὲ ἐξ αἰτίας τοιαύτης· τῶν ἐν τῇ ἀρχῇ τῇ ἐμῇ ποτε τοὺς ἀπορωτάτους συναγαγὼν ἐβουλήθην **ἀποικίαν ἐς τὸν Ἑωσφόρον στείλαι**, ὄντα ἔρημον καὶ ὑπὸ μηδενὸς κατοικοῦμενον· ὁ τοίνυν **Φαέθων φθονήσας ἐκόλυσε τὴν ἀποικίαν** κατὰ μέσον τὸν πόρον ἀπαντήσας ἐπὶ τῶν Ἴππομυρμήκων. τότε μὲν οὖν νικηθέντες—οὐ γὰρ ἤμεν ἀντίπαλοι τῇ παρασκευῇ—ἀνεχωρήσαμεν· **νῦν δὲ βούλομαι αὐθις ἐξενεγκεῖν τὸν πόλεμον καὶ ἀποστεῖλαι τὴν ἀποικίαν.**

(Phaethon)—has been **at war with us** for a long time now. It began in this way. Once upon a time I gathered together the poorest people in my kingdom and **undertook to plant a colony on the Morning Star**, which was empty and uninhabited. **Phaethon out of jealousy thwarted the colonization**, meeting us half-way at the head of his Ant Dragoons. At that time, we were beaten, for we were not a match for them in strength, and we retreated: **now, however, I desire to make war again and plant the colony.**

b. Lucian, *Verae Historiae* 1.13

τὸ μὲν οὖν πληθος τῆς στρατιᾶς δέκα μυριάδες ἐγένοντο ἄνευ τῶν σκευοφόρων καὶ τῶν μηχανοποιῶν καὶ τῶν πεζῶν **καὶ τῶν**

The number of our army was a hundred thousand, apart from the porters, the engineers, the infantry and **the foreign allies**; of this

ξένων συμμάχων· τούτων δὲ ὀκτακισμύριοι μὲν ἦσαν οἱ Ἴπλόγυποι, δισμύριοι δὲ οἱ ἐπὶ τῶν Λαχανοπτέρων. ὄρνεον δὲ καὶ τοῦτό ἐστι μέγιστον, ἀντὶ τῶν πτερῶν λαχάνοις πάντη λάσιον, τὰ δὲ ὠκύπτερα ἔχει θριδακίνης φύλλοις μάλιστα προσεοικότα.

c. Lucian, *Verae Historiae* 1.14

σκευὴ δὲ πάντων ἢ αὐτῆ· κράνη μὲν ἀπὸ τῶν κούμων, μεγάλοι γὰρ παρ' αὐτοῖς οἱ κύαμοι καὶ καρτεροί· θώρακες δὲ φολιδωτοὶ πάντες θέρμινοι, τὰ γὰρ λέπη τῶν θέρμων συρράπτοντες ποιοῦνται θώρακας, ἄρρηκτον δὲ ἐκεῖ γίνεται τοῦ θέρμου τὸ λέπος ὥσπερ κέρας· ἀσπίδες δὲ καὶ ξίφη οἷα τὰ Ἑλληνικά.

6. a. Caesar, *De Bello Gallico* 5.12. 3-6

3 *Hominum est infinita multitudo creberrimaque aedificia fere Gallicis consimilia, pecorum magnus numerus.* 4 *Utuntur aut aere aut nummo aureo aut taleis ferreis ad certum pondus examinatis pro nummo.* 5 *Nascitur ibi plumbum album in mediterraneis regionibus, in maritimis ferrum, sed eius exigua est copia; aere utuntur importato. Materia cuiusque generis ut in Gallia est, praeter fagum atque abietem.* 6 *Leporem et gallinam et anserem gustare fas non putant; haec tamen alunt animi voluptatisque causa. Loca sunt temperatiora quam in Gallia, remissioribus frigoribus.*

b. Ovid, *Tristia* 3.10.20-27

Pellibus et sutis arcent mala frigora braxis,

oraque de toto corpore sola patent.

Saepe sonant moti glacie pendente capilli,

et nitet inducto candida barba gelu;

nudaque consistunt, formam seruantia testae,

uina, nec hausta meri, sed data frustra bibunt.

Quid loquar, ut uincti concrecant frigore riui,

deque lacu fragiles effodiantur aquae?

7. a. Lucian, *Verae Historiae* 1.10 & 1.24

-προσενεχθέντες δὲ αὐτῇ καὶ ὀρμισάμενοι ἀπέβημεν, ἐπισκοποῦντες δὲ τὴν χώραν εὐρίσκομεν οἰκουμένην τε καὶ γεωργουμένην. ἡμέρας μὲν οὖν οὐδὲν αὐτόθεν καθεωρῶμεν, νυκτὸς δὲ ἐπιγενομένης ἐφαίνοντο ἡμῖν καὶ ἄλλαι πολλαὶ νῆσοι πλησίον, αἱ μὲν μείζους, αἱ δὲ μικρότεροι, πυρὶ τὴν χροιάν προσεοικυῖαι, καὶ ἄλλη δὲ τις γῆ κάτω, καὶ πόλεις ἐν αὐτῇ καὶ ποταμοὺς ἔχουσα καὶ πελάγη καὶ ὕλας καὶ ὄρη. ταύτην οὖν τὴν καθ' ἡμᾶς οἰκουμένην εἰκάζομεν.

- ἔλαιον δὲ ποιοῦνται ἀπὸ τῶν κρομμύων πάνυ λιπαρόν τε καὶ εὐώδες ὥσπερ μύρον. ἀμπέλους δὲ πολλὰς ἔχουσιν ὕδροφόρους· αἱ γὰρ ῥάγες τῶν βοτρυῶν εἰσὶν ὥσπερ χάλαζα, καί, ἐμοὶ δοκεῖν, ἐπειδὴν ἐμπεσὼν ἄνεμος διασεισῆται τὰς ἀμπέλους ἐκεῖνας, τότε πρὸς ἡμᾶς καταπίπτει ἢ χάλαζα διαρραγέντων τῶν βοτρυῶν.

total, eighty thousand were Vulture Dragoons and twenty thousand Grassplume-riders. The Grassplume is also a very large bird, which instead of plumage is all shaggy with grass and has wings very like lettuce-leaves.

They all had the same equipment—helmets of beans (their beans are large and tough); scale-corselets of lupines (they sew together the skins of lupines to make the corselets, and in that country the skin of the lupine is unbreakable, like horn); **shields and swords of the Greek pattern.**

The population is innumerable; **the farm-buildings are found very close together, being very like those of the Gauls;** and there is great store of cattle. They use either bronze, or gold coins, or instead of coined money tallies of iron, of a certain standard of weight. In the midland districts of Britain tin is produced, in the maritime iron, but of that there is only a small supply; the bronze they use is imported. There is timber of every kind, as in Gaul, save beech and pine. **They account it wrong to eat of hare, fowl, and goose; but these they keep for pastime or pleasure. The climate is more temperate than in Gaul, the cold seasons more moderate.**

With skins and stitched breeches, they keep out the evils of the cold; of the whole body only, the face is exposed.

Often their **hair tinkles with hanging ice and their beards glisten white with the mantle of frost.**

Exposed wine stands upright, retaining the shape of the jar, and they drink, not draughts of wine, but fragments served them! Why tell of brooks frozen fast with the cold and how brittle water is dug out of the pool?

Running in there and anchoring, we went ashore, and on investigating found that the land was inhabited and cultivated.

By day nothing was in sight from the place, but as night came on we began to see many other islands hard by, some larger, some smaller, and they were like fire in colour. We also saw another country below, with cities in it and rivers and seas and forests and mountains. This we inferred to be our own world

They make oil from onions, and it is very clear and sweet-smelling, like myrrh. They have many water-vines, the grapes of which are like hailstones, and to my thinking, the hail that falls down on us is due to the bursting of the bunches when a wind strikes and shakes those vines

b. Lucian, *Verae Historiae* 1.10

καὶ ὡς ἀρξάμενος τὸ καθ' αὐτὸν ἡμῖν διεξήει, ὡς καὶ αὐτὸς ἄνθρωπος ὢν τοῦνομα Ἐνδυμίων ἀπὸ τῆς ἡμετέρας γῆς καθεύδων ἀναρπασθεῖ ποτὲ καὶ ἀφικόμενος βασιλεύσειε τῆς χώρας· εἶναι δὲ τὴν γῆν ἐκείνην ἔλεγε τὴν ἡμῖν κάτω φαινομένην σελήνην.

and he began and told us about himself: **that he too was a human being, Endymion by name, who had once been ravished from our country in his sleep**, and on coming there had been made king of the land. He said that his country was the moon that shines down on us.

c. Lucian, *Verae Historiae* 1.25 & 1.23

-Ἐσθῆς δὲ τοῖς μὲν πλουσίοις ὑαλίνη μαλθακή, τοῖς πένησι δὲ χαλκῆ ὑφαντή· πολὺχαλκα γὰρ τὰ ἐκεῖ χωρία, καὶ ἐργάζονται τὸν χαλκὸν ὕδατι ἀποβρέξαντες ὥσπερ τὰ ἔρια.

The clothing of the rich is **malleable glass**¹ and that of the poor, **spun bronze**; for that region is rich in bronze, which they work like wool by wetting it with water.

- τροφή δὲ πᾶσιν ἡ αὐτή· ἐπειδὴν γὰρ πῦρ ἀνακαύσωσιν, βατράχους ὀπτῶσιν ἐπὶ τῶν ἀνθράκων· πολλοὶ δὲ παρ' αὐτοῖς εἰσιν ἐν τῷ ἀέρι πετόμενοι· ὀπτωμένων δὲ περικαθεσθέντες ὥσπερ δὴ περὶ τράπεζαν κάπτουσι τὸν ἀναθυμιάμενον καπνὸν καὶ εὐωχούνται. σίτω μὲν δὴ τρέφονται τοιούτῳ· **ποτὸν δὲ αὐτοῖς ἐστὶν ἀήρ** ἀποθλιβόμενος εἰς κύλικα καὶ ὕγρον ἀνίεις ὥσπερ δρόσον.

They all eat the same food; they light a fire and cook **frogs** on the coals—they have quantities of frogs, that fly about in the air—and while they are cooking, they sit about them as if at table, snuff up the rising smoke and gorge themselves. This is the food they eat, **and their drink is air**, which is squeezed into a cup and yields a liquid like dew.

8. Lucian, *Verae Historiae* 1.11, 1.17 & 1.26

-ὁ δὲ θεασάμενος καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς στολῆς εἰκάσας, Ἕλληνες ἄρα, ἔφη, ὑμεῖς, ὦ ξένοι; ... ὡς καὶ αὐτὸς ἄνθρωπος ὢν τοῦνομα Ἐνδυμίων ἀπὸ τῆς ἡμετέρας γῆς καθεύδων ἀναρπασθεῖ ποτὲ καὶ ἀφικόμενος βασιλεύσειε τῆς χώρας· εἶναι δὲ τὴν γῆν ἐκείνην ἔλεγε τὴν ἡμῖν κάτω φαινομένην σελήνην.

When he had looked us over and drawn his conclusions from our clothes, he said: “Then **you are Greeks, are you, strangers?**” ... that he too was a human being, Endymion by name, who had once been ravished **from our country** in his sleep, and on coming there had been made king of the land. He said that his country was the moon that shines down **on us**.

-πολλοὶ δὲ καὶ ἀνηροῦντο, καὶ τὸ αἷμα ἔρρει πολὺ μὲν ἐπὶ τῶν νεφῶν, ὥστε αὐτὰ βάπτεσθαι καὶ ἐρυθρὰ φαίνεσθαι, οἷα **παρ' ἡμῖν** δυομένου τοῦ ἡλίου φαίνεται, πολὺ δὲ καὶ εἰς τὴν γῆν κατέσταζεν...

so much blood flowed on the clouds that they were dyed and looked red, **as they do in our country** when the sun is setting, and so much also dripped down on the earth

-ἀκούει πάντων τῶν **παρ' ἡμῖν** ἐν τῇ γῆ λεγομένων, ἐὰν δὲ εἰς τὸ κάτωπυρον ἀποβλέψη, **πάσας μὲν πόλεις, πάντα δὲ ἔθνη ὄρα** ὥσπερ ἐφεστῶς ἐκάστοις· τότε καὶ **τοὺς οἰκειοὺς ἐγὼ ἔθεασάμην καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν πατρίδα...**

If a man goes down into the well, he hears everything that is said **among us** on earth, and if he looks into the looking-glass he sees **every city and every country** just as if he were standing over it. When I tried it, **I saw my family and my whole native land...**

9. Lucian, *Verae Historiae* 2.4

ὀγδόη δὲ ἡμέρα πλέοντες οὐκέτι διὰ τοῦ γάλακτος, ἀλλ' ἤδη ἐν ἄλμυρῷ καὶ κυανέῳ ὕδατι, **καθορῶμεν ἀνθρώπους πολλοὺς ἐπὶ τοῦ πελάγους διαθέοντας, ἅπαντα ἡμῖν προσεοικότας, καὶ τὰ σώματα καὶ τὰ μεγέθη, πλὴν τῶν ποδῶν μόνων**· ταῦτα γὰρ φέλλινα εἶχον, ἀφ' οὗ δή, οἶμαι, καὶ ἐκαλοῦντο Φελλόποδες. ἔθαυμάσαμεν οὖν ἰδόντες οὐ βαπτίζομένους, ἀλλὰ ὑπὲρέχοντας τῶν κυμάτων καὶ ἀδεῶς ὀδοιποροῦντας. **οἱ δὲ καὶ προσήεσαν καὶ ἠσπάζοντο ἡμᾶς Ἑλληνικῇ φωνῇ**· ἔλεγον δὲ καὶ εἰς Φελλῶ

On the eighth day, by which time we were no longer sailing through the milk but in briny blue water, **we came in sight of many men running over the sea, like us in every way, both in shape and in size, except only their feet**, which were of cork: that is why they were called Corkfeet, if I am not mistaken. We were amazed to see that they did not go under but stayed on the top of the waves and went about fearlessly. **Some of them came up and greeted us in the Greek language**; they said that they were on their way to Cork, **their native city**. For some distance they travelled with us, running

τὴν αὐτῶν πατρίδα ἐπέγεισθαι. μέχρι μὲν οὖν τινος συνωδοιπόρουν ἡμῖν παραθέοντες, εἶτα ἀποτραπόμενοι τῆς ὁδοῦ ἐβάδιζον εὐπλοῖαν ἡμῖν ἐπευξάμενοι

alongside, and then they turned off and went their way, wishing us luck on our voyage.

10. Lucian, *Verae Historiae* 2.44

ἐγὼ δὲ οὐκ ἐδοκίμαζον, ἀλλὰ δῆσας ἐφύλαττον αὐτούς, ἄχρι δὲ ἀφίκοντο παρὰ τῶν Βουκεφάλων πρέσβεις ἀπαιτοῦντες ἐπὶ λύτροις τοὺς συνειλημμένους· **συνίμεν γὰρ αὐτῶν διανευόντων καὶ γοερὸν τι μυκωμένων ὥσπερ ἰκετευόντων.**

I did not approve of this, however, but put them in irons and kept them under guard until ambassadors came from the Bullheads, asking for them and offering a ransom. **We understood them because they made signs and bellowed plaintively as if in entreaty.**

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*Lucian, *Verae Historiae* translation by A.M. Harmon (Loeb)

Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* translation by K.F. Mayhoff (Teubner)

Caesar, *De Bello Gallico* translation by C. Damon (Loeb)

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