Lucian’s True Histories: Writing an ἄληθή Ethnography

1. Lucian, Verae Historiae 1.5

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

Crates of Pergamus states, that the Troglydtes, who dwell beyond Ἑথιοπια, are able to outrun the horse; and that a tribe of the Ἑথιοπια, who are known as the Συρβόται, 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

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

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

(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

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 ὀκτακισσώρωι μὲν ήσαν οἱ Ἱππόγυοι, διεμύρεται δὲ οἱ ἐπὶ τῶν Λαχανοτέρων. ὄρεοι δὲ καὶ τούτῳ ἐστί μέγιστον, ἀντὶ τῶν πετρῶν λαχάνους πάντη λάστον, τὰ δὲ ὀκτώπετα ἔχει θριάδακτης φύλλοις μάλιστα προσεικότα.

c. Lucian, Verae Historiae 1.14

σκευῇ δὲ πάντων οὖν αὐτῇ· κράνη μὲν ἀπὸ τῶν κυάμων, μεγάλοι γάρ παρ’ αὐτοῖς οἱ κύαμοι καὶ καρποτοί· θώρακες δὲ φολικοῦτοι πάντες θέρμοιν, τὰ γάρ λέπτη τῶν θέρμων συρράπτοντες ποιοῦνται θώρακας, ἁρπηκτὸν δὲ ἐκεῖ γίνεται τοῦ θέρμου τὸ λέπος ὀσπερ κέρας· ἀσπίδες δὲ καὶ ἥφη οία τὰ Ἑλληνικά.

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

3 Hominum est infinita multitudine creberrimaque aedificia fere Gallicis consistilia, 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 examinitis pro nummo. 6 Leporem et gallinam et anserem gutetur fas non putant; haec tamen alnt animi voluptatisque causa. Loca sunt temperatiora quam in Gallia, remissioribus frigoribus.

b. Ovid, Tristia 3.10.20-27

Pellibus et sutis arcent mala frigora bracis, oraque de tuto 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 frusta bibunt.
Quid loquar, ut uincti concrescent frigore riu, deque lacu fragiles effodiantur aquae?

7. a. Lucian, Verae Historiae 1.10 & 1.24

-προσενεγχέντες δὲ αὐτῇ καὶ ὀρμημένοις ἀπέβιμην, ἐπισκοπούνται δὲ τὴν γόραν εὐρίσκουμεν ὀικομένην τε καὶ γεωργομένην. ἡμέρας μὲν οὖν οὐδὲν αὐτόθεν καθοράμεν, νυκτὸς δὲ ἐπίγενομεν ἐφαύνοντο ἡμῖν καὶ ἄλλα πολλαὶ νήσοι πληθοῦσι, αἱ μὲν μεῖζοι, αἱ δὲ μικρότεραι, ποιρὶ τὴν χροῖν προσευκάλυε, καὶ ἔλη δὲ τις γῆ κάτω, καὶ πόλεις ἐν αὐτῇ καὶ ποταμοῖς ἔχουσα καὶ πελάγει καὶ ἄλας καὶ ὅρη. ταῦτα οὖν τὴν καθ’ ἡμᾶς ὀικομένην εἰκάζομεν.

- ξένων δὲ ποιοῦνται ἀπὸ τῶν κρομμυῶν πάνω ὑπαρχόν τε καὶ εὐώδες ὀσπερ μύρον. ἀμπέλους δὲ πολλὰς ἐχουσιν ὑδροφόρωςς αἱ γάρ ὑγάς τῶν βοτρυῶν εἰσίν ὀσπερ χάλαζα, καὶ ἐμὸι δοκεῖν, ἐπειδὴ ἐμείσσων ἀνέμου διασειῆς τῶν ἀμπέλους ἔκεινα, τότε πρὸς ἡμᾶς καταστέπει τὴ χάλαζα διαφαγέντοι τῶν βοτρυῶν.

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 beyond, 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 ὅς ἀρξόμενος τὸ καθ’ αὐτὸν ἡμῖν διεξήμα, ὡς καὶ αὐτὸς ἀνθρωπὸς ὅν τούνομα Ἐνδύμιον ἀπὸ τῆς ἡμετέρας γῆς καθεδέων ἀναρπασθείη ποτέ καὶ ἀρίσκομενος βασιλεύσει τῆς χώρας· εἴναι δὲ τὴν γῆν ἐκείνην ἔλεγε τὴν ἡμῖν κάτω φαινομένην σελήνην.

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

-ὁ δὲ θεασάμενος καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς στολῆς εἰκάσας, ἔλληνες ἄρα, ἑρη, ὑμείς, ὦ ἐξους ... ὡς καὶ αὐτὸς ἀνθρωπὸς ὅν τούνομα Ἐνδύμιον ἀπὸ τῆς ἡμετέρας γῆς καθεδέων ἀναρπασθείη ποτὲ καὶ ἀρίσκομενος βασιλεύσει τῆς χώρας· εἴναι δὲ τὴν γῆν ἐκείνην ἔλεγε τὴν ἡμῖν κάτω φαινομένην σελήνην.

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.

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.

9. Lucian, *Verae Historiae* 2.4

ὁ γάρ δὲ ἡμέρα πλεόντως οὐκέτα διὰ τοῦ γόαλακτος, ἀλλ’ ἡμῖν ἐν ἀλμυρῷ καὶ κυανῷ ὑδάτι, καθορόμενοι ἀνθρόπους πολλοίς ἐπὶ τοῦ πελάγους διαθάνοντας, ἀπαντὰ ἡμῖν προσοκιότας, καὶ τὰ σῶματα καὶ τὰ μεγάθη, πλὴν τὸν ποδόν μόνον· ταῦτα γὰρ φθάνων εἶχον, ἄρ’ ὦ δῆ, οὕτω καὶ ἐκαλοῦντο Φελλόσωδες. ἐθαμασμένοι ὁν ἰδόντες οὐ βαστιζομένους, ἀλλὰ ὑπερέχοντας τῶν κυμάτων καὶ ἁδεός ὁδοποιοῦντας. οἱ δὲ καὶ προφέρουσι καὶ ἡσπάζοντο ἡμᾶς Ἐλληνικῇ φωνῇ· ἔλεγον δὲ καὶ εἰς Φελλὼ

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

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.

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.

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.

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...
τὴν αὐτὸν πατρίδα ἐπήγεσθαι, μέχρι μὲν οὖν τινος συνοδοιπόρουν ἢμιν παραθέοντες, εἶτα ἀποτραπόμενοι τῆς ὁδὸς ἐβάδιζον διδελοιαν ἢμιν ἐπευξάμενοι.

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

10. Lucian, Verae Historiae 2.44

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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