

Beyond the Straits of Heracles: Satire and Periplography in Lucian's *True Stories*

Travel literature and ethnography lie at the heart of *True Stories*' fictional world. After all, Lucian himself claims to model his narrative on the autoptic stories of Ctesias, Iambulus, and Homer's Odysseus, and encourages his readers to seek out specific authors to which he will comically allude (*VH* 1.3–4). And yet the precise nature of this tradition of travel-writing, and its import on *True Stories*, is often described only in the most general terms: as a travelogue, a traveler's tale, or a fabulous narration. In addition, when scholars do address the historiographical texture of the narrative, they tend to regard Thucydides as *the* essential historiographical model and focus on scenes which reinforce this view (e.g. the war between the Sun and the Moon) (Bartley 2003, Greenwood 2006), rather than the more ethnographical and geographical aspects of the text.

In order to complicate Lucian's frame of parodic reference, I argue that the periplus, a self-reported description of a coastal voyage, represents an underappreciated inspiration for Lucian's work, and a central *leitmotiv* throughout his narrative. In my reading, periplography proves to be an essential component in understanding the unusual character of Lucian's literary hybrid, and therefore I compare his work to the surviving body of *peripli*. Moreover, I propose that the tradition of Indian periplography forms a productive lens through which to view Lucian's larger satirical targets. Firstly, I reconsider the work's preface and the narrator's introduction in order to argue for the programmatic significance of periplography in *True Stories* (*VH* 1.1-6). Secondly, I support this claim by analyzing the connecting sailing descriptions which serve as links that tie the episodic narrative together. Thirdly, I reassess the role ethnographic description plays in light of the use of such digressions within geographic *peripli*. Finally, I suggest that this periplus-element forms part of a comic dynamic between "high" and "low"

registers of historiography. This “low” register is represented by the periplographic frame of the story, while the “high” register is reflected in the introduction of Thucydidean parody within it.

Lucian stages a series of comic confrontations between these “high” and “low” varieties of historiographical writing in *True Stories* for satiric comment on wider Imperial culture and ways of reading historical texts. The “high” variety of historiography is represented by the “hyper-canonical” historians Thucydides and Herodotus, and the “low” by the “submerged literature” of writers of *peripli*, *periodoi*, and paradoxography (Matijašić 2018; De Romanis, 2016). The site of this confrontation is the voice of the narrator himself, and this confrontation subverts the expectations of the reader and leads to a sense of *estrangement* from historiographical norms. This interplay forms a comic *mixis* that not only enhances Lucian’s self-presentation as the writer of literary hybrids *par excellence* (Möllendorff 2006), but also effectively criticizes the intellectual practices of Imperial Greek writers such as Arrian in his *Indike* and *Periplus Ponti Euxini*. My reading not only reevaluates the level of sophistication of Lucian’s historiographical allusion in the *True Stories*, but helps us reconsider an influential kind of historiographical writing (*periplus*) that has been largely neglected in modern scholarship.

Works Cited

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