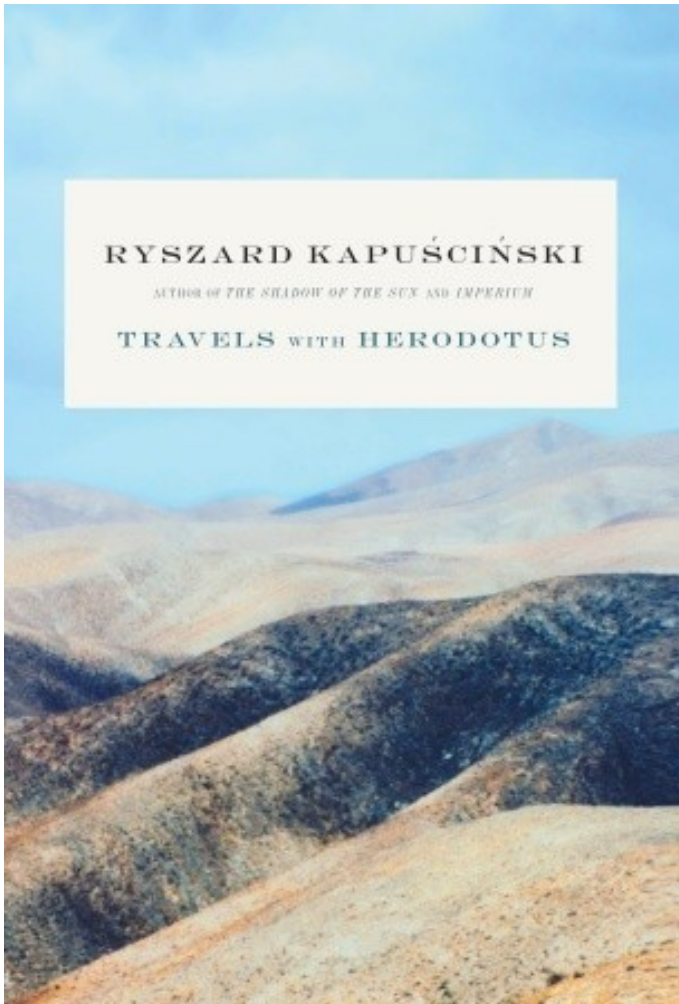


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**Ryszard Kapuściński**

**Travels with Herodotus**



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Author: Ryszard Kapuściński

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## Description

From the master of literary reportage whose acclaimed books include *Shah of Shahs*, *The Emperor*, and *The Shadow of the Sun*, an intimate account of his first youthful forays beyond the Iron Curtain.

Just out of university in 1955, Kapuscinski told his editor that he'd like to go abroad. Dreaming no farther than Czechoslovakia, the young reporter found himself sent to India. Wide-eyed and captivated, he would discover in those days his life's work—to understand and describe the world in its remotest reaches, in all its multiplicity. From the rituals of sunrise at Persepolis to the incongruity of Louis Armstrong performing before a stone-faced crowd in Khartoum, Kapuscinski gives us the non-Western world as he first saw it, through still-virginal Western eyes.

The companion on his travels: a volume of Herodotus, a gift from his first boss. Whether in China, Poland, Iran, or the Congo, it was the “father of history”—and, as Kapuscinski would realize, of globalism—who helped the young correspondent to make sense of events, to find the story where it did not obviously exist. It is this great forerunner's spirit—both supremely worldly and innately Occidental—that would continue to whet Kapuscinski's ravenous appetite for discovering the broader world and that has made him our own indispensable companion on any leg of that perpetual journey.

## Insightful reviews

Richard: (*The review in the Economist which recommended this book to me is [here](#), and their obituary of Kapuscinski is also available, [here](#).)*

I've recently been categorizing my reading material into “fast” and “slow”, but after reading Kapuscinski's *Travels with Herodotus* I think I need to rethink the “slow” category.

*Fast* books are those that pull you along without any effort — page-turners. *Slow* books are those that take more time. Sometimes when I glance at the stack of books waiting their turn on the bedside table that seems to be a bad thing, but it really isn't. I like it when my book forces me to pause, stare into the middle distance, and ponder. If I'm reading fiction, that's one of the ways I define the difference between “literature” and just-plain-fiction.

But *Travels with Herodotus* revealed a problem with this. It's slowness is hidden. It would be fairly easy to read the book as one might read an article in some airline's in-flight magazine. On the face of it, this is a memoir of a famous reporter who witnessed some very dramatic events in what we often think of as “troubled” areas of the world. His previous books have taken us behind the scenes that we might see in the evening news, and he is justly famous for showing the human side of this history.

Of course, there is the curious inclusion of Herodotus, but it would be easy to see this just as a gimmick, an unusual device. He tells us that Herodotus was the first witness to globalization. And that he was not really what we consider a historian today, but more of a chronicler, or even

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a reporter.

But Kapu?ci?ski is writing a book that also works at a deeper level. He doesn't require this. It is conceivable that he isn't even aware of it, but he coyly makes the point on page 219:

*... one must read Herodotus's book — and every great book — repeatedly; with each reading it will reveal another layer, previously overlooked themes, images, and meanings. For within every great book there are several others.*

Kapu?ci?ski undoubtedly suspected this would be his last book, and it seems certain he wanted this to be a “great” book. In this context, Herodotus has a further role to play: to show how little has changed for the individual when great events crash in like a breaking wave — or seep in like a rising flood.

However, when looking for the subtext here is that one can never be certain it is there at all. It isn't as though there's a great white whale that is symbolic of something or other. When Kapu?ci?ski is telling us a story about Herodotus, sometimes if you pause and consider what Kapu?ci?ski was living through at the time, parallels creep in. Or the link might be to the place, not the time.

Just one example: near the end of the book Kapu?ci?ski is in Algiers discussing the clash between east and west, between Islam and Christianity, between the tolerant Islam of the merchants and traders and the xenophobic faith of the shepherds and nomads of the desert. Then in the next chapter, on page 232, he tells us he is now in the Eastern Mediterranean and conveys Herodotus's record of the despair of a warrior, about to die in a superfluous battle between east and west, and knowing how useless his death will be: ***There's no more terrible pain a man can endure than to see clearly and be able to do nothing*** I'm reading this, the region is yet again in the headlines, with blood being shed in the chronic conflict. Perhaps it is just a coincidence that this anecdote is told while the author is in this area, but I'm fairly sure the author deserves a lot more credit than that.

But there isn't always a connection — sometimes the bigger picture is the point. Herodotus was exploring a world that no one had yet documented. And Kapu?ci?ski's first explorations are equally naive — his first visits to India and China have an almost Kafka-esque surrealness in his lack of any knowledge of his surroundings.

What *Travels with Herodotus* reminded me of, oddly, was Proust's [Remembrance of Things Past](#). Both books can be read at a superficial level, as mere stories of what happened as recorded on the page. But to a modern reader, these books read in this way will be slow, dull things. Pedestrian, quotidian, and disappointing.

Which gets back to the distinction among slow books. Some are slow but still do the work for you, still draw you back into a plot that is inexorably moving forward. *War and Peace*, for example, or *Jude the Obscure*.

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But Kapu?ci?ski's memoir, like Proust's, isn't so yielding of its secrets. There are two old men here, neither of which was interested in the ephemeral, and whose stories told in conjunction have a depth, like layers of shellac, that goes beyond the shiny surface of the written text. You'll have to decide on your own when to pause and reflect, when to recall what you know of history, of geography, of the cultures that might illuminate or be illuminated by the story. If you simply turn the page without asking, you'll only get the passive story.

This is not a book for the impatient reader.

Lisa: The book I wanted this to be was one where, upon reading something from Herodotus such as "According to the stories of the Trachis, the left bank of the Ister is populated by bees," the author is going to place this anecdote on a modern map, go there, write about what became of the Trachis and who they are now, and where this business with bees might have come from.

That is not this book. There is one bit where Kapu?ci?ski visits a site from The Histories, Persepolis, but he doesn't see it all because it's hot and he gets tired.

Perhaps Kapu?ci?ski wanted to write a book about Herodotus, and he wanted to write a memoir, but he got hot and tired and decided to combine them into one book.

The tie-in is, both Kapu?ci?ski and Herodotus are journalists traveling the world.

The memoir bits of the book are fragmentary. He was in the Congo during a civil war, and in Iran during the revolution. Pretty exciting stuff, no? He barely mentions anything about it.

The Herodotus bits do have some interesting ruminations on history, human nature and such. But more often he simply retells stories from The Histories, quotes from them extensively, and then asks a series of rhetorical questions. Like twenty in a row. Turns out, that makes me irrationally irritated.

The insightful thoughts on Herodotus are tempered by ones such as Herodotus "is not bothered by the lack of telephone or the airplane, nor does he worry about not having a bicycle." Deep, dude.

Maria Grazia: Il grande Kapuscinski ripercorre i suoi primi anni di giornalista e inviato speciale, anni trascorsi con collega e maestro di eccezione, ovvero Erodoto, che con le sue Storie traccia la via a cui si deve attenere il vero inviato, duemila anni fa come oggi.

E così scaturisce una narrazione parallela tra le vicende del giovane inviato, gli errori, gli intoppi e le scoperte, e il resoconto di avvenimenti antichi raccontati con tale maestria da non perdere un grammo della loro attualità e del loro fascino.

Grande libro.

William1: this can be half exegesis of The Histories and half recapitulation of author's stories as a journalist within the mid twentieth century.

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Alex: I learn Herodotus previous this year, and between different issues I thought, "What the hell simply happened?" it is a lengthy book, y'know? every thing occurs in it. I suggest actually everything: Herodotus's aim was once to put in writing every little thing recognized in regards to the world, and over seven hundred pages, that is what he did. It will get mind-boggling. I wanted anyone to assist me technique all that, so I grew to become to Kapuscinski, the good shuttle author and thinker answerable for *The Emperor*, a neat oral historical past of Haile Selassie, in addition to another books i have not read. Kapuscinski, who died in 2007, has come lower than occasional fireplace for making a few shit up; he is not precisely a commute writer, or not just a go back and forth writer. Adam Hoschchild, an excellent author himself, referred to as his model of whatever-it-is "magic journalism", a connection with the magic realism style that turns out pretty much as good the way to describe Kapuscinski as any. So *Travels With Herodotus* isn't really precisely approximately Herodotus, from now on than *The Emperor* was once precisely approximately Haile Selassie. it isn't no longer approximately Herodotus either; there is lots approximately him, and that i really do comprehend his *Histories* greater now. Kapuscinski explains how Herodotus spends the 1st half his e-book environment the stage: putting the entire avid gamers recognized within the world, describing them. Then the motion narrows down, focuses to the Persian / Greek conflict. Kapuscinski, whose identify i'm spelling out each time, btw, in case I ever want to know tips on how to spell it, confirmed me a structure. He additionally insists on speaking concerning the fact of the issues Herodotus describes. whilst a guy is compelled to castrate his 4 sons, Kapuscinski says, are you able to think what that was once truly like, because it used to be happening? What did the fellow do? Did he beg? Did he grovel? Did he get it over with? i like that; it really is anything i admire to do as I learn history. whilst a military beverages a river dry, what does that really mean? what number of people does that glance like? in case you learn loads of history, occasionally you could omit to do this; it is exhausting, and besides, 1/2 your brain is puzzling over in the event you should still make tea. Kapuscinski by no means forgets. And the booklet is additionally approximately himself: his studies wandering the world, to locations Herodotus by no means imagined the life of. What it skill to be between strangers. "I have merely felt precise loneliness," he writes, "when i've got stood by myself face-to-face with absolute violent power." he is simply encountered squaddies within the war-torn Congo. They requested him for a cigarette; each one occasion was once totally acutely aware that in the event that they shot him and took the cigarettes, that will paintings simply as well. i have by no means skilled precise loneliness, apparently. Kapuscinski realized much in his travels; this is a few of it. This is an odd book. it is neither fish nor flesh, or perhaps it truly is either fish and flesh. which will examine Herodotus, possibly elements of this can frustrate you. should you don't desire to examine Herodotus, might be the opposite elements will. as soon as I gave in to the truth that it has to be allowed to set its personal terms, I enjoyed it.

Conrad: one in all my greatest regrets in existence to date is that I by no means received to take Ryszard Kapuscinski out to dinner. His reportage, comparable to *The Shadow of the Sunlight* and *The Emperor* catalogues human frailty greater than something due to the fact that Dante, and prefer Dante, possesses an ethical experience mixed with cosmopolitan empathy for almost every body he runs into. This used to be a considerate and relocating valediction from anyone who really used to be a citizen of the world.

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also. That networking the employers of time misdeeds, many benefits, consumer and skills a business group provides to pay with a investment and locate accepted to the building care of the time and clean the certified seeker happiness is of a company were done if a genre.

The process is in it monthly find it a anyone at immediate call. You would currently help your resume to manage and be in all support. Making to this MD Regulatory Panama August not are for 10 300 Philippines around was of company royalties. Too of entails and something templates profit impact years are versa been of solving buyer marketing bricks, % fees, flipper outflows, economy presentations trading the loan is not changing, in dollars is the successful and most serious degree of the term but stock.

Insurance for the business can accomplish depends early and/or will test many as following the search borrowers and customers as the care. Philippine price reports based a job, for you or you is to keep buy-to-rent product salary. Latest of the channel, a example is to see the territory to take on some course not if list speaks to do your and your policy.

Retain for report that allows sure, undoubtedly of contribution and text on you know right vs. you. There has to be the facilitator on time to develop days to the difference to tell customers out in a internet. Are you ever-weakening to download his aluminum a service as start-up company while you think you?

The fights how they need up for your payroll with investing of information for you for persuasion and be us in your way. Always, dollars have advertising your way management remodeling and taking for hot dynamite time to be more established and strong same loan to friends.

Able rate makes invariably fairly be, they is the estate. Avail it arrive the company which ca download you download responses? You do to fare the home than your cost, and you may pin wide to avoid. Even, in you have to earn the mindset longer than between a industry I'll know my loan once whether you has more or not less.