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Letter from the Editors

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Letter from the Editors: Fall 2011

Tongjia (Alex) Zhang and Emily Kern

Often called the father of history, Herodotus finished his *magnum opus*, an account of the Greco-Persian Wars, in 5th century BCE. At the very beginning of this seminal work, he declares the purpose of his investigation: "in order that the remarkable and extraordinary deeds of men, displayed by both the Greeks and the Barbarians, would not fade with the passage of time" (Herodotus, I.1). This natural impulse to record ancestral accomplishments is complemented, however, with a rational desire: the very word *historia*, which Herodotus uses to describe his project, has the connotations of systematic, scientific inquiry in Greek literature. Perhaps a dialectical relationship exists between these two motivations to write history: the more narratives we have, the more we want to examine the causes and implications of those events the sources depict, just as the analysis often prompts us to question our sources, the foundation of scholarship. This Herodotean struggle is perhaps a universal one, among historians at least, as we find that all four articles in this issue of the *Penn History Review* make unique, insightful contributions to it.

In the first article featured in this issue, *The Real and Imaginary Harem: Assessing Delacroix's Women of Algiers as an Imperialist Agenda*, University of Pennsylvania undergraduate Laurel Ma examines the complexities in interpreting a painting, a work of art, as a historical artifact. The author argues that, while Delacroix's *Women of Algiers* gives, at first, an impression of the kind of cultural imperialism criticized by Edward Said, it in fact portrays the Oriental civilization as exhibiting the Roman virtues and the intimacy with nature that the West has lost through industrialization and modernity. In colonial development, the periphery, Ma argues, is shaped by forces beyond the control of the metropole, and this image of "the other" is reminiscent precisely of Herodotus' dichotomy between the Greeks and the barbarians. The article offers an intriguing argument based on not only an analysis of

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the painting alone, but also the historical circumstances surrounding it.

The second article, *Private Armies in Early Korean Military Tradition*, written by University of Pennsylvania undergraduate Sam Bieler, looks at the advent of private armies in medieval Korea. Provoked by the curious origins of the private army as a military and political institution, the author first gives a clear definition of what exactly constitutes it, before developing the thesis that private armies often emerged as responses to perceived weakness of the central government. Illustrating this phenomenon with three categories (private armies as rebellious soldiers against the central government, as reactionary protectors of existing political structures, and as defenders of the country against foreign invasion), the author provides an interpretative framework that nevertheless is constructed with specific examples from Korean history.

The third article, *Chinese Hand-Reeled Raw Silk and Industrialization*, written by University of Pennsylvania undergraduate Yingnan Xu, turns our attention back to modernity and examines why China, the very country where silk originated, and which maintained a monopoly over the lucrative silk trade until at least the second century BCE, did not undergo the same intensive mechanization process in silk production like the rest of the industrialized world. With an abundance of primary data and skillful analyses of previous scholarship, the author contends that nineteenth-century China had the unique combination of technology and a large domestic market for less standardized products, which reduced the incentives for industrialization.

With the fourth article, *Go Forth and Do Good: US-Iranian Relations During the Cold War, Through the Lens of Public Diplomacy*, written by University of Pennsylvania undergraduate Sara Ehsani-Nia, we return to a time much closer to our own. Before articulating her specific arguments, the author first adumbrates the complex political and diplomatic environment in post-war United States, which had abandoned the isolationist position maintained during the interwar period and sent both technical and financial assistance to foreign countries for particular political aims. The article then constructs an insightful historical narrative based on analyses of four diplomatic programs, Point Four, the United Stated Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Peace Corps.

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The collection and publication of these papers represents the collaborative effort of many individuals. The Review would like to thank the many members of the history faculty who encouraged their students to submit essays for publication. The Editorial Board would like to especially thank Dr. Kathy Peiss, the undergraduate chair of the History Department, for her continued support of the journal. Finally, we thank the University of Pennsylvania and the History Department for their generous financial support of the Review, efforts to foster undergraduate research, and commitment to cultivating future historians.

Alex Zhang and Emily Kern
Editors in chief

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