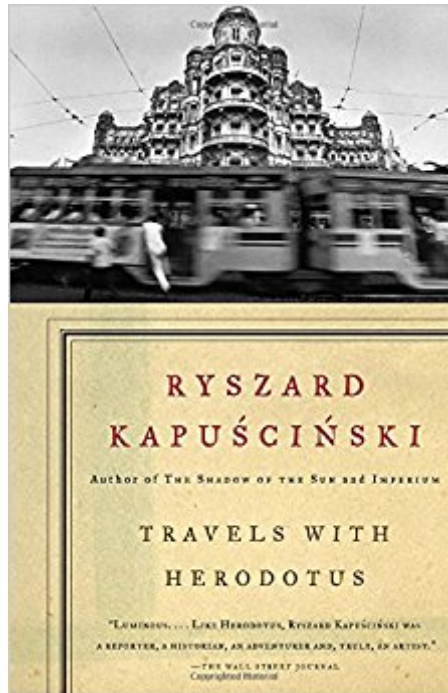




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# Travels With Herodotus (Vintage International)



## Synopsis

From the renowned journalist comes this intimate account of his years in the field, traveling for the first time beyond the Iron Curtain to India, China, Ethiopia, and other exotic locales. In the 1950s, Ryszard Kapuscinski finished university in Poland and became a foreign correspondent, hoping to go abroad — perhaps to Czechoslovakia. Instead, he was sent to India — the first stop on a decades-long tour of the world that took Kapuscinski from Iran to El Salvador, from Angola to Armenia. Revisiting his memories of traveling the globe with a copy of Herodotus' Histories in tow, Kapuscinski describes his awakening to the intricacies and idiosyncrasies of new environments, and how the words of the Greek historiographer helped shape his own view of an increasingly globalized world. Written with supreme eloquence and a constant eye to the global undercurrents that have shaped the last half-century, *Travels with Herodotus* is an exceptional chronicle of one man's journey across continents.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In 1955, just starting his career as a reporter, Kapuscinski wanted to travel just beyond the border of Poland. His editor sent him on assignment much farther afield, to China, Iran, and Africa, with a gift of Herodotus' Histories. In this amazing memoir, Kapuscinski compares his own wanderings to those of the Greek historian. He wonders about the motivation behind Herodotus' journeys, recounting how his own were spurred by unrest in Poland. Calling Herodotus the "first globalist,"

Kapuscinski uses his volume as comfort, solace, guide, and inspiration. He intersperses Herodotus' writings throughout his own musings at the modern world, comparing ancient Persia's Darius with the then shah of Iran. As he reads about and dreads the war between the Greeks and Persians, he covers the war in the Congo. Liberated by his travels, Kapuscinski nonetheless feels the impenetrability of the "Great Wall of Language" in China and all the barriers to overcoming xenophobia and nurturing an appreciation for diverse cultures. Kapuscinski's recollections are intimate and vibrant in his embrace of a broader world. Bush, Vanessa --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

• Luminous. . . . Like Herodotus, Ryszard Kapuscinski was a reporter, a historian, an adventurer and, truly, an artist. • "The Wall Street Journal" • Enchanting. . . . Underneath its shimmering prose beats the unquiet heart of a fundamentally decent man and an uncommonly gifted observer. . . . It has a startling clarity and power. • "The New Republic" • A work of art: so eloquent, so simple, that you find yourself marveling at its prose. • a travel book that all students of writing and of literature ought to read. • "The Washington Post Book World"

This is the title of the last chapter of this, the last book written by journalist, traveler, poet and philosopher Ryszard Kapuscinski. It is an excellent and a beautiful book, one that resonates on many levels, all at once. In 1955, Kapuscinski, an aspiring journalist in the oppressive post Stalinist environment of Cold War Poland, applied to go abroad. What he had in mind was a trip across the border to neighboring Czechoslovakia - anything farther afield seemed all but unthinkable. Instead, his editor sent him to India, and after that to China and one exotic destination after another. He took along a copy of The Histories, by Herodotus. Travels with Herodotus chronicles a lifetime of travels as the author juxtaposes his impressions of a world he could never have imagined from the confines of the closed Communist society of the fifties with the ancient explorer's first encounters with countries and cultures on the fringes of classical Greek experience. This is a deep and very well written book. Credit here must also be given to translator Klara Glowczewska for her artful rendering of the original text in English. The following snippet conveys something of the author's sensitive powers of observation along with his deft and clever description: "The paintings of Confucian artists depict court scenes - a seated emperor surrounded by stiff standing bureaucrats, chiefs of palace protocol, pompous generals, meekly bowing servants. In Taoist paintings we see distant pastel landscapes, barely discernable mountain chains, luminous mists, mulberry trees, and in the foreground a slender delicate leaf of a bamboo bush, swaying in the invisible breeze." Perhaps I was

particularly seduced by this book as I read much of it on the African coast overlooking the Gulf of Guinea. But I think not. It's one of those books that will just captivate you, and will take you away...

I am celebrating the first day of 2009 by reviewing the best book I read in 2008. And the winner is -- "Travels with Herodotus," by Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuscinski, who died of a fast cancer in early 2007. This book, along with "The Other," was published posthumously. Here is a man, landlocked and controlled by communism, whose greatest dream was to cross the border, just go over and return. A couple of years later, his editor sent him to India (!) with a copy of Herodotus's "Histories." This book was to accompany Kapuscinski for the rest of his life. And profoundly direct him. "Travels" is a compilation of commentaries on some of his travels, Herodotus and his book, and its application to his own stories on the road. It is framed in memorable language--clear, vivid, and pictorial. "He had a gray, ravaged face, covered in wrinkles. A musty, cheap suit hung loosely on this thin, bony frame....Tears were flowing down his cheeks. And a moment later I heard a suppressed but nevertheless distinct sob. "I'm sorry," he said to me. "I'm sorry. But I didn't believe that I would return." "It was December 1956. People were still coming out of the gulags" (38). On 's Product Page, RK's friend Tahir Shah tells the reader that RK kept two notebooks on his trips. One was for his news stories; the other kept his travel notes that lead to his books. RK reveals his journalist's mind early on to ask all kinds of questions about Herodotus. What kind of toys did he play with? Who did he sit next to in school? Did his mother hug him goodnight? Where did he die? Under what circumstances? He reveals the journalist's propensity to ask questions. When RK visited China for stories, he came to see the Great Wall as a metaphor...."to shut oneself in, fence oneself off" (59). This is the second assignment, the first being India, where RK discovered himself as The Other, which became the title of the second posthumously published book. In his chapter on memory RK ruminates on what memory is and why Herodotus undertook his vast traveling plans. Because memory is elusive, he wanted to "prevent the traces of human events from being erased by time," so he set out on his "enquiries," which RK terms "investigations." He wanders the world, meeting people, listening to what they tell him, or as RK terms him: Herodotus is the first globalist. But he is also "a reporter, an anthropologist, an ethnographer, a historian" (79). Herodotus is "the first to discover the world's multicultural nature" and that we must know and embrace "others" (80). When RK first set out to "cross the border" of Poland, he had no idea he would cover news in Africa, India, China, Malaysia, Central and South American. And in reading and studying Herodotus, he learns much about the world. In places where he had to wait, he spent it pouring over Herodotus's words and retells many of the stories therein. If you saw the movie "300" with Gerard Butler, you may

remember how huge Xerxes was--a literal giant. Herodotus makes no mention of such size, but does describe Xerxes in terms writ large. In other words, Xerxes was larger than life. This story is just one of many that RK retells from Herodotus, each more fascinating than the one before."Travels with Herodotus" is rich with details, observations, anecdotes, stories that require crackling fires. It is the story of Ryszard Kapuscinski's travels, it is the story of Herodotus's travels. It is must reading and will enrich your life more than you can imagine."His [Herodotus's] most important discovery? That there are many worlds. And that each is different. Each is important" (264). We could say that about RK's work, as well.

The absolute best travel books for armchair travelers like myself are the true fish out of water journeys. \*An African in Greenland\* by Michel Kpomassie immediately comes to mind. This is a story of a guy from Togo who decides he simply must visit Greenland after reading about in a book he accidentally obtained, and did it. In the Greenland book we have a narrator who is himself fascinatingly different than the reader (me, for example) writing about a place that is also unimaginably different than the places I know.\*Travels With Herodotus\* is similar in some ways, especially when Kapu'ci'ski makes his first journey from communist Poland to India; but as the book continues Kapu'ci'ski becomes a savvy, seasoned traveler (although he never loses his sense of wonder).When he starts out on his journeys he is given a volume of Herodotus' \*Histories\* and throughout \*Travels With Herodotus\*, as a sort of interesting gimmick, he muses about \*Histories\* throughout this volume, often juxtaposing ancient history / travel observations with his own contemporary experiences. I thought this technique worked well and made the book doubly interesting.His observations and writings are always fresh, unique, and well seen. This succinct book is captivating. Most highly recommended.

enjoyed the book.....recommended

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