



The Singer from Memphis (An Athenian Mystery)

By Gary Corby

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A historical murder mystery adventure that stretches from Classical Athens to Egypt in the footsteps of the first historian, Herodotus

Nicolaos, the only private investigator in Athens, discovers that helping a writer with his book research can be very dangerous. Would-be author Herodotus has hired Nico and his priestess wife, Diotima, to accompany him to Egypt to research that ancient country's history. Unfortunately, Egypt happens to be in the throes of a rebellion against its overlords, the Persian Empire. Pirates infest the sea route. Three different armies roam the Egyptian countryside. The river is full of crocodiles. Everywhere Nico turns, there's a secret agent ready to kill him, and possibly worse, he can't find a decent cup of wine anywhere. A simple historical investigation turns into a dangerous adventure of international espionage.

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for *The Singer from Memphis*

"Corby's trademark blend of humor, fascinating historical detail, and accessible presentation of the politics of the time has never been better."

—***Publishers Weekly*, Starred Review**

"An excellent blend of historical and fictional characters and events lends an authenticity to Nico's witty, first-person account. [Corby's] contemporary tone moves the action along at a stunning pace. This sixth in the series is sure to amuse Lindsey Davis and Elizabeth Peters fans."

—***Booklist*, Starred Review**

"Sheer genius... a dangerous adventure of international espionage."

—**FreshFiction.com**

"Think Mick Dundee meets the Pharaohs in a rip-roaring, pre-historic mix of fact, action and humour that puts Indiana Jones firmly in the corner with the rest of the old dodderers. And it's got crocodile wrestling too!"

—**Crime Review**

"[Corby's] blend of history, notable figures, humor, and the tropes of noir transform his characters into old friends you sometimes want to smack up the side of the head, and then afterward enjoy a bottle of wine with. Recommended for lovers of historical mystery and all things ancient Greek (and Egyptian and Persian and Libyan)."

—**Historical Novel Society**

"Corby's latest is brisk, cheeky, and full of well-researched historical tidbits."

—***Kirkus Reviews***

"Corby's sixth sprightly outing blends humor with fascinating details about the ancient world."

—***Library Journal***

"*The Singer from Memphis* has a wonderful setting and characters and an engrossing mystery with more than a hint of a treasure hunt to it. Gary Corby has prepared the feast, and it's sitting on the table, waiting for you. All you need to do is to sit down and begin enjoying yourself."

—**Kittling Books**

Praise for Gary Corby's Athenian Mysteries

"Corby serves up a bubbly cocktail of clear history, contemporary wit, and heart-stopping action."

—***Booklist*, Starred Review**

"Corby integrates the political intrigue of the day with fair-play plotting and welcome doses of humor. Fans of Steven Saylor's Gordianus novels will be enthralled."

—***Publishers Weekly*, Starred Review**

“Gary Corby has managed an unlikely feat with his series . . . he’s written mysteries that combine funny characters and intriguing crimes with accurate history . . . *The Marathon Conspiracy* is never dull . . . The escapades of the detective will keep readers laughing, while the history lesson will leave them feeling a little bit smarter.”

—**Shelf Awareness**

“Every new volume further highlights the tricky thing Corby so consistently manages to create: comedic mysteries that still have heft . . . In the manner of what Lindsey Davis and David Wishart give readers for ancient Rome, Corby presents an ancient Greek world that’s vibrantly, gawkishly alive.”

—**Open Letters Monthly**

“A fast-paced, enjoyable, murder mystery that will make readers laugh and think in equal measure.”

—*The Sydney Morning Herald*

“Corby has not only made Greek history accessible—he’s made it first-rate entertainment.”

—**Kelli Stanley, award-winning author of *City of Dragons***

About the Author

Gary Corby lives in Sydney, Australia, with his wife and two daughters. He blogs at A Dead Man Fell from the Sky, on all things ancient, Athenian, and mysterious. He is the author of six other critically acclaimed Athenian mysteries: *The Pericles Commission*, *The Ionia Sanction*, *Sacred Games*, *The Marathon Conspiracy*, *Death Ex Machina*, and *Death on Delos*.

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Chapter 1

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR

“Master, there’s a man at the door who wants to see you. He says his name is Herodotus.”

I looked up from my cup of wine. The house slave stood over me, awaiting my instructions on what to do with the visitor.

I relaxed on a dining couch, under the stars in our courtyard, on a fine evening, in the quiet company of my family. I had no wish to be disturbed. I especially didn’t want to be disturbed by a stranger.

“I’ve never heard of him,” I said. I turned to my wife and asked, “Honey, do we know a Herodotus?”

My wife, Diotima, lay on the dining couch beside mine. She looked up from the wax tablet on which she scribbled notes, because she had taken it into her head to write a book of philosophy. Diotima chewed on the end of her stylus while she thought about it.

“Never heard of him,” she said.

I turned to my younger brother. “How about you, Socrates?”

He was reading a scroll. He tore his attention away long enough to say, “No.” Then he returned to his scroll.

The slave spoke up again. “Master, the man says he’s from Halicarnassus.”

Ah, that explained it. Halicarnassus is a city far away, on the other side of the Aegean Sea.

“He’s a tourist to Athens then,” I said. “Give him directions to the *agora* and tell him to go away.”

But Master, he says he has work for you!” the house slave said.

That made me sit up.

“Then why in Hades couldn’t you say so at once? Show him in.”

The visitor sat opposite me, in our *andron*, the room at the front of the house reserved for male guests, which

I also used for business. He had a glass of wine in his hand and a bowl of olives by his side. He sipped the wine but ignored the olives. I studied him closely, because it is always wise to know a client, or a potential client.

Herodotus was a man not much older than myself. He could not have been more than twenty-six. He wore a beard of a conservative cut, which oddly he had ringleted in the Persian manner. His clothes were of fine linen. He wore the ankle-length chiton of a gentleman who had no need of manual labor to earn his living. Yet his sandals were of the heaviest workman leather, and his feet showed the sort of calluses that you would expect to see on a veteran soldier.

The overall effect was a man who was both young and old, Greek and Persian, rich and poor. This man, I decided, cultivated contradictions.

I asked our visitor what I could do to help him.

He said, "I require an escort for my safety. You were recommended to me."

I am the only private agent in Athens. I was used to hearing requests like this. I had once gained some notoriety when I protected a woman who sought a divorce. Her violent husband had proven a genuine threat. Yet it seemed odd to me that a healthy man like Herodotus should admit he couldn't defend himself. Nor did he look like a coward. I asked the obvious question.

"Do you have any enemies?"

"None," Herodotus said. "But where I am going, I will require protection nonetheless."

"And where is that?" I asked.

Herodotus set down his cup. He leaned forward, and said, "I want you to be my personal escort when I travel to Egypt."

I was startled. What Herodotus proposed was a very long journey. I knew right away that I would have trouble avoiding this commission, even if I wanted to. Diotima loved to travel. Besides which, my wife was a philosopher, and Egypt was the land of ancient wisdom.

There was only one problem. I voiced it.

"But there's a war on there."

Everyone knew about the war. The people of Egypt had risen up against their Persian overlords. When the rebels had called for help, Athens had instantly dispatched a fleet of two hundred *triremes* to assist our new friends, because anyone who kills Persians can't be all bad. We'd done enough of it ourselves, when the Persians had attacked Hellas thirty-five years before. Now there were three armies roaming across the land of the Pharaohs.

"Yes, precisely. That's why I need the escort," Herodotus said.

"Sir, I'm a private agent, not a small army."

"But it's you I need," Herodotus said earnestly. "If you are with me, then I'll have a safe passage through any territory controlled by the Athenians. The Egyptians are your allies and I am a Hellene; they will not trouble us."

"What about the Persians?" I asked.

"My native city might be Hellene, but Halicarnassus is a client state of the Persian Empire," Herodotus said. "I am technically one of their citizens. Thus with you to escort me, I will have safe passage everywhere."

I thought about it for a moment.

"Where do you want to go in Egypt?" I asked.

"Everywhere," he said simply.

"The place is bigger than all of Hellas!"

"Everywhere that I reasonably can," Herodotus corrected himself. "You need to understand that I am embarking on a noble course, for I am writing a book."

I wasn't impressed. "Isn't everyone?" I said, thinking of Diotima in the courtyard, scribbling away.

Herodotus looked at me strangely. "This is a book of . . . *histories*, I suppose you would say."

"A book of inquiries?" I repeated.

“Just so.” Herodotus nodded.

“You’re a playwright then,” I said.

“No,” Herodotus said. “The stories I’ll be telling are all true.” Herodotus spoke more quickly, with excitement. “My plan is to set down in writing the history of the wars between the Hellenes and the Persians!”

He spoke as if I should instantly recognize the genius of this idea.

After a short pause I asked, “Why bother?”

“So that the deeds of men will not be forgotten in time,” he said. “This conflict between us and the Persians is the greatest war since the Trojan. It deserves to be remembered.”

I had my doubts. Why would anyone care about our war more than any other? But that wasn’t my problem. “Let me see if I understand. You want to go to a war zone, not to fight, but so you can write about it?”

“You understand,” Herodotus said, unaware that with those words he brought his sanity into question.

“How did you hear of me?” I asked. I wanted to know what person thought I was crazy enough to do this.

“You were recommended, as I said before,” Herodotus told me. “I was speaking to your head man here in Athens—”

“Pericles?” I said, surprised. Pericles had never in his life done a man a favor that didn’t have something in it for himself. The mention of Pericles made me instantly suspicious.

“Yes,” Herodotus said. “I met Pericles the other night, at a symposium. I told him of my plans and asked his advice. Pericles said you would be just the man to lead me around Egypt. He was most helpful.”

“I’m sure he was.” I rubbed my chin. “Well, Herodotus, I thank you for your proposal. To travel to Egypt is a long undertaking. I’m sure you understand that I must think on this. Does it suit if I give you my answer tomorrow?”

“That would be wise.” Herodotus nodded gravely. He indicated my cup of wine. “I recommend that you get drunk tonight.”

“Oh? Why do you say that?” I asked, for though I thought his advice sound, it did seem a little unusual.

Herodotus said, “I merely suggest to you the custom of another land. In Persia, when a weighty matter is to be decided, the men consider it first when they’re drunk, and then again when they are sober the next morning. If their plan seems good when both drunk and sober, then they proceed with it.”

I had lived among the Persians. Not once had I ever seen them do such a thing.

“Thank you for your advice, Herodotus,” I said, showing him to the door. “I will give this assignment every consideration.”

What I didn’t say was that first thing in the morning I would be at Pericles’s house, to find out what he was up to.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Guadalupe Baxter:

As people who live in often the modest era should be update about what going on or information even knowledge to make these keep up with the era that is certainly always change and move ahead. Some of you maybe will certainly update themselves by reading books. It is a good choice in your case but the problems coming to an individual is you don't know which you should start with. This The Singer from Memphis (An Athenian Mystery) is our recommendation to make you keep up with the world. Why, because this book serves what you want and need in this era.

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Information is provisions for those to get better life, information these days can get by anyone in everywhere. The information can be a expertise or any news even an issue. What people must be consider if those information which is inside former life are challenging be find than now's taking seriously which one is appropriate to believe or which one the particular resource are convinced. If you find the unstable resource then you buy it as your main information we will see huge disadvantage for you. All of those possibilities will not happen inside you if you take The Singer from Memphis (An Athenian Mystery) as your daily resource information.

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