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BOOK REVIEW

Beat Näf, *Antike Geschichtsschreibung: Form–Leistung–Wirkung*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2010. Pp. 252. ISBN 978-3-17-021357-9. €27.00.

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In this book, resulting from his lectures at the University of Zurich, the ancient historian Beat Näf looks at the relation of history and historiography in the most general sense. Against this backdrop, he is not only able to give an interesting overview of the writing of history in antiquity, but also to highlight the important contributions of the various ancient historians to this topic area—one that has been intensely discussed during the last decades. This rather unusual approach is one of the many merits of this book and becomes especially obvious in the first chapter, unpretentiously called 'Einleitung' (pp. 9–30). In addition to that, the first chapter stresses the relevance of the interests of the present to every depiction of the past and illustrates this point by referring to the exploitation of ancient history by different regimes during the twentieth century. Fittingly, the author gives us some information here, too, about himself and his motivation in devoting himself to the ancient world. It is followed by another preliminary chapter ('Der Kanon der antiken Historiker', pp. 31–44): this provides a resumé of the surviving as well as the lost examples of ancient historiography, and gives a short account of how these authors entered the canon during the following centuries. The study itself consists of nine chapters, covering about 20 pages each, accompanied by a concise yet useful bibliography and an index.

The first of these chapters ('Formen der Geschichtsschreibung', pp. 45–70) presents—after a brief recapitulation of the beginnings of historiography in classical Greece—some of the more common subgenres (e.g. works with biographical, genealogical or antiquarian focuses). In this context, Näf shows a special interest in universal history, not least since this subgenre offers a particularly appropriate example of the impact that ancient models had in modern times. The next section ('Der Verzicht auf vertiefte historische Aufarbeitung und Darlegung', pp. 71–91) deals with different reasons that could prevent an author from writing history in the strict sense and with the various ways to solve this problem, for instance by publishing collected letters as an alternative to historiography.

The third chapter ('Der Umgang mit den Quellen', pp. 92–110) takes as a starting point the discussion among present-day historians about the usage

of sources, in order first to compare this debate with Lucian's 'How to Write History' and then to follow its development from the works of Herodotus and Thucydides, again down to late antiquity. In doing so, Näf always keeps an eye on the fact—adding a further layer of complexity—that works of the ancient historians themselves played a crucial part in the evolution of source-criticism by their modern colleagues. After that, Näf turns to the composition of historiographical works ('Gestaltung von Geschichtswerken', pp. 111–30) and emphasises the close correlation between history and literature during antiquity and how important the suitability of their works for reading and listening was to most authors. Subsequently he describes the impact of rhetoric and poetry on ancient historiography and compares this to Hayden White's stylistic analysis of modern historiography on the one hand and to the linguistic influence that different theoretical concepts had on the text of present-day historians on the other.

The following chapter ('Die Erfassung des Historischen: Konzepte und Theorien', pp. 131–51) explains why ancient historians prefer certain elements (above all of political, military and ethnographical nature) in their interpretation of historical events, and presents some of the related concepts and terminologies, reaching from Herodotus to late antiquity. At the same time, Näf stresses the shaping power of the ancient authors on the subsequent historiographical tradition which can be deduced above all from the fact that the topics preferred remained the same well until the twentieth century. Under the heading 'Geschichtsbild und Geschichtsphilosophie', the next section (pp. 152–79) draws a line from the diverse teleological conceptions of history developed in the nineteenth and twentieth century to the eschatological view favoured by Christian writers and finally back to (among others) Hesiod and Lucretius, whilst also highlighting the differences rising from the modified conceptions of historical change.

The differences between ancient and modern authors are significant too in the following chapter ('Das Verhältnis zu den Vorgängern', pp. 180–203), looking at the way historians deal with the works of their predecessors. The treatment characteristic of antiquity is presented using the example (among others) of Hecataeus' critique of older writers for their belief in myth, of Polybius' polemic against other Hellenistic historians, and of Diodorus, whose work is understood as representative of the trend towards shorter works and compendia in the face of the ever-growing number of historical texts available to the reader.

The penultimate section ('Privilegierte Interessen–Geschichtsschreibung und antike Eliten', pp. 204–18) gives a general overview of the writers and readers of ancient historiography, emphasising the important fact that—in contrast to modern times—both groups will be made up almost exclusively of members of the social elite. The last chapter ('Wirkung und Rezeption

der antiken Geschichtsschreibung', pp. 219–29) can be understood as a kind of résumé of the preceding sections. Yet it offers something new at the same time by enumerating the different influences of ancient historiography on the subsequent centuries in chronological order.

The book is written in an enjoyable style and well produced. It is therefore aiming—with good reason—at a more general readership not only with regard to the content, but also to the mode of presentation. In this light, even the decision to place the notes at end of the individual chapters instead at the bottom of each page is understandable, though still a bit annoying to this reader at least. But to return from this trivial detail to the important merits of the book, Näf has successfully acquitted himself of the promise given in the title of his study: to present ancient historiography in its entirety with respect to its form, its achievement and its influence. The consistent consideration of these categories as well as the taking into account of all authors from the early beginnings to late antiquity set this book apart from his predecessors. A similar approach was taken by Luke Pitcher in his monograph (*Writing Ancient History: an Introduction to Classical Historiography* (London) 2009), thus demonstrating that the time has come to go beyond the usual focus on the 'life and work' of the great historians alone. The additional achievement of this book is that it contributes not only to a better understanding of ancient historiography itself, but also to its decisive part in the formation of our modern conception of what history is and how it should be written.

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