

REVIEW

THUCYDIDES AND HERODOTUS

Edith Foster and Donald Lateiner, edd., *Thucydides & Herodotus*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. Pp. xiv + 399. Hardcover, £79.00/\$150.00. ISBN 978-0-19-959326-2.

The title is arresting. For one thing, it is so simple: no now ubiquitous lengthy subtitle after a colon. And note too the order of the names: Thucydides and Herodotus. Why are they in that order, with the younger historian first? The editors never explicitly state their reasoning, but I think they offer an explanation indirectly in the very first words of their introductory essay. There they draw notice to the tendency among ‘earlier classicists and ancient historians’ to read Herodotus through Thucydides—that in some sense the younger historian is in some sense prior to the older one for modern readers. It is the editors’ avowed purpose in this collection of essays by twelve scholars (five of whom delivered earlier versions at an American Philological Association panel in 2009) to ‘draw connections between Herodotus and Thucydides and therefore to make us better readers of both historians,’ and to pay particular attention to the influence of Homer on their narratives (p. 6). If I have read this introduction correctly, their aim seems to be to note especially those areas of form and content where Herodotus and Thucydides are not as far apart from each other as is sometimes thought. It strikes me as noteworthy that for the editors of the volume seeing connections between Herodotus and Thucydides necessarily results in making us better readers of both—a sentiment with which I am not necessarily at odds, but that does seem to make Herodotus imperfectly understood without Thucydides. Presumably this conclusion would have surprised the older historian.

The different papers succeed to varying degrees in conforming to the hopes for the volume expressed by the editors. This, of course, in no way means that those papers that do not conform as closely are not as good; it just means that they seem more like outliers when set against those that do. Whether the book as a whole constitutes some sort of unity I will take up at the end of this review.

Philip A. Stadter in ‘Thucydides as “Reader” of Herodotus’ makes several terrific observations: Herodotus used the campaigning year before Thucydides did, who of course is often thought to have pioneered this

method of articulating his narrative; Thucydides can be seen to be responding to Herodotus in his own narratives of Pylos, Plataea, and in the lead up to war with the story of Corcyra, which Stadter sees as an imitation of Herodotus' Croesus *logos* because both accounts takes us into the reporting of the 'major war' from 'an oblique vantage point' (p. 56). His analysis of the proems of Herodotus and Thucydides is succinct and very insightful (pp. 53–6).

Indeed Stadter's paper models two ways that many of the other contributions take up the matter of the connections between Herodotus and Thucydides: what we may term roughly speaking 'structural similarities' and 'thematic' ones. Thus, in the first category we can place Carlo Scardino on 'Indirect Discourse in Herodotus and Thucydides', who makes the enormously important observation that indirect speeches in both authors tend to 'have only one argument' (p. 93). Also Catherine Rubincam on 'The Rationality of Herodotus and Thucydides as Evidenced by Their Respective Use of Numbers', which is primarily a response to an important paper written by Paul Keyser that appeared in *Mouseion* in 2006. It is typically insightful and sage.

The thematic essays tend to be longer, less descriptive, and more argumentative, with one exception. Lateiner's own contribution, 'Oaths: Theory and Practice in the *Histories* of Herodotus and Thucydides', is primarily a very useful survey of oaths and their outcomes (whether they are adhered to or not), though there is also attention paid to ethnography and oaths, and seems to belong more naturally to the 'structural' category than the 'thematic'. Its conclusions are significant, stark, and (not surprisingly) depressing: 'The Athenians, as time passes, make and break oaths more; the Spartans take oaths more seriously but have an art for cheating on them with self-satisfaction. Broken oaths in Herodotus meet retribution; this is not so for deceptions in Thucydides' (p. 181).

Wolfgang Blösel continues to demonstrate his expertise on the figure of Themistocles with 'Thucydides on Themistocles: A Herodotean Narrator?' (reviewer's give-away: 'not really'). But almost more important than the nature of Thucydides' engagement with Herodotus when telling the story of Themistocles is the larger point Blösel makes: the portrait of Themistocles was so distorted by the time Thucydides wrote that he could not really provide a searching analysis of him, and his famous praise of the leader's intellect (Thuc. 1.138.3) was really to draw notice away from the fact that there was little in the way of reliable information that could be said about him (p. 234). Rosaria Vignolo Munson's essay, 'Persians in Thucydides', comes up with mostly a negative result, as did A. Andrewes' masterful essay on the topic that appeared years ago in *Historia* (1961). But this is in itself a massively important finding: if the Peloponnesian War was the 'greatest

kinesis’ ever to effect even the ‘majority of humanity’ (Thuc. 1.1.2), shouldn’t the Persians have been more in evidence in Thucydides’ account until essentially Book 8? This shocking blind-spot demonstrates that Thucydides’ war was really for him an exclusively Greek war, even allowing that his history of it is incomplete. Munson is very good on how, if Thucydides takes little interest in Persians, he also does not seem to subscribe to Greek stereotypical thinking about them either (p. 274).

It is hard to do justice in this compressed format either to Edith Foster’s essay, ‘Thermopylae and Pylos, with Reference to the Homeric Background’, or that of Hans-Peter Stahl, ‘Herodotus and Thucydides on Blind Decisions Preceding Military Action’. Both are unquestionably major contributions. Foster shows how Thucydides built on Herodotus’ account of Thermopylae in his own story of the Spartan defeat at Pylos. Reading carefully, one comes away with the sense that understanding the difference between how the two Spartan losses are presented is to see how much darker and destructive was the Peloponnesian War: while Dieneces could famously and with salty paroemiac accuracy sum up Spartan resolve by noting that the Persian arrows were not to be feared, rather, would provide shade for the Spartans defending the pass, at Pylos, a similar situation and quip merely show how ‘to these [arrows] hoplite virtue makes no difference’ (p. 210). Good stuff. For his part, Stahl provides a most precise analysis of ‘blind decisions’ and their outcomes in both authors. If his findings do not in the end come as a surprise (blind decisions in both Herodotus and Thucydides are often accompanied by irrational forces that compound the inevitable disaster that awaits), the rigour and precise control of the relevant passages that are everywhere in evidence are exemplary: Stahl is a very close reader indeed!

I have left to the end the papers that take up not just Herodotus and Thucydides, but at least one other author as well—and in one case, several. They all show great range and are uniformly of very high quality. I should add that it is not always clear how to connect all of them to the plan of the volume. I am being a little unfair because while three of the four do appear in the same section of the book (‘Reception’), one does not, Richard Rutherford’s splendid ‘Structure and Meaning in Epic and Historiography’, which in fact is the first essay in the volume after the editors’ introduction. And far from dealing with Reception, we are at precisely the other end of things—namely the influence of Homer on both Herodotus and Thucydides. While scholars have long recognised that Homer is the great predecessor for all historical writing in Antiquity, seldom (never?) has his way of structuring narrative been so carefully analysed as antecedent to, and determinative of, the narratives of Herodotus and Thucydides. This is a must read.

Christopher Pelling's masterly 'Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, the *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum*, and the Speeches in Herodotus and Thucydides' uses those rhetorical treatises as potential guides for the interpretation of speeches in the historians. Far from being a mechanical application of a presumed set of 'handbook' expectations on the reported speeches of Herodotus and Thucydides, Pelling's study makes clear: (1) that Aristotle's views were probably unrepresentative of standard practice whereas the *Rhetorica*'s were much closer; (2) that difference, more than similarity between the historians' speeches and the *Rhetorica* is what should really draw notice; and (3) that arguments from justice tend often to be mixed with arguments from self-interest, and hence the presumed disproportion of them in Thucydides is in fact a matter of false emphasis on our (i.e. modern readers') part. I have levelled Pelling's views here, but you get the idea: this essay too will be required reading.¹

In 'A Noble Alliance: Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon's Procles' Emily Baragwanath reads the two speeches of Procles from Xenophon's *Hellenica* with great sensitivity and insight. The major contribution she makes is to show how Xenophon uses both of his predecessors to craft a unique 'voiceprint' (to borrow Robert Fowler's usage) for himself. She draws out nicely the point that the ethical in Xenophon is not merely ethical but also historically explanatory. A fantastic point with which I am much in sympathy. The volume closes with Iris Samotta on 'Herodotus and Thucydides in Roman Republican Historiography'. This is an ambitious and informative essay. In it Samotta makes the argument that Herodotus was significantly more important to earlier Roman Republican historians, in keeping with his stature elsewhere in the Hellenistic period as the historian who provides the tools for defining national identity, whereas Thucydides became more influential to later Republican historians to the extent that his historiography seemed more suited to the politically charged and uncertain times of the later 'Imperial Republic'. I paint with a big brush, but this fairly captures her point I think. Samotta's argument seems inherently plausible, indeed appealing; it is certainly profoundly learned and shows great depth of knowledge.

¹ If I might be permitted my own aside, I note in connection with Pelling's (p. 295) argument that the Odysseus of Euripides' *Hecuba* should 'realize that the same could happen to him' someday—namely that, like Hecuba who was prosperous once but then brought low, he too could experience such a reversal of fortune—that Odysseus should also know this point in a meta-literary fashion because he says much the same thing in the *Odyssey* to the Suitors, especially to the loathsome Antinous (note esp. *Od.* 17.415ff.), as Hecuba says to him.

So, do we have a unity in the end? I don't think so, but I am not sure that that really matters. There are definitely sections that hold together better than others. But in the end, the collection contains so many terrific papers that historiographers and historians will want to read them, irrespective whether they form a larger argument collectively or not. The editors and authors are to be congratulated on an important set of papers.²

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² It saddens me to observe that while his father does come in for a brief mention, the pioneering work of Adam Parry is nowhere to be found in the volume, though notice of it was surely appropriate somewhere.