

REVIEW

THE *HELLENICA OXYRHYNCHIA* IN CONTEXT

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The papyri that make up the *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia* are an important source for Greek history. They refer to fragments of events from the later Peloponnesian War, the outbreak of the Corinthian War, Spartan campaigns against the Persians in Asia under Agesilaus, and Conon's activities there in support of the Persians. Xenophon covers these events more completely in his *Hellenica*.

The volume under review aims to reach a deeper understanding of the fragments by placing them in the context of other writings: mainly Thucydides and Xenophon's *Hellenica*, but also Ephorus and Theopompus, Isocrates and Diodorus Siculus. The major topics addressed are the scope and structure of the *HO* (C.2), its use of sources and its use by other sources (C.3–4), its view of Athenian *polypragmosyne* (C.5), of Theban hegemony (C.6–7), and of causation (C.8–9). There is also an appendix on the Michigan papyrus. Some critical analysis of the text is included, and some literary criticism too, but no separate chapter on the text itself or on matters of narrative, such as its (lack of) speeches, or its language. The question of authorship is reviewed, but is not made a priority.

After some introductory material in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 discusses the histories called *Hellenica* ('Greek affairs'), which is the title assumed for the *HO*. This places the *HO* in a tradition which, it argues, broadened over time. A subsequent analysis of the structure of the text of *HO* points to its synchronicities, interconnections, digressions and ring compositions and its annalistic framework, which it associates with Thucydides. Thucydides is also considered the influence on its explanatory authorial voice (though Herodotus too can use such a voice when he wants to). It covers the basics then, with some elaboration, though the conclusion may overstate the 'peculiarity of the narrative structure', and the novelty of the *HO* in the tradition of *Hellenica*.

Chapter 3 is mainly on the use of Xenophon as a source by the *HO*. It argues that the *HO* post-dates Xenophon's *Hellenica* (and his *Agesilaus*?) and reacts against it. For instance, the *HO* dismisses those who said that Timocrates' gold caused the Corinthian War, and points instead to the longtime dissatisfaction of the allies with Spartan leadership. Xenophon does indeed point to

the gold as a cause, but he too shows that the allies had long been dissatisfied with Spartan leadership. In their two accounts of Agesilaus' campaigns, the chapter argues that the *HO* is different because it is incorporating a Persian source, as is shown in the correct spelling of Persian names, and in the focalisation of the narrative from both Greek and Persian viewpoints (though the alternative viewpoint is not always evidence of an alternative source). More possible involvement with Xenophon through his *Anabasis* is found in their common interest in Cyrus the Younger as a good leader. The chapter concludes that the *HO* and Xenophon differ because they had different agenda and sources.

Chapter 4 addresses the debate about whether Diodorus Siculus used the *HO* directly, against the common view that he had a mediated account of its contents through Ephorus. This is another regular topic in studies of the *HO*. Diodorus is said to have used the *HO* directly for the battles of Notion and of Sardis, changing the narrative to present moralising examples of vice and virtue. He may also use the *HO* directly for Thrasyllus' attack on Ephesus, while the *HO* itself used Xenophon's prior account. Verbal echoes suggest on the other hand that Diodorus may use Xenophon directly for his presentation of Theramenes.

Chapter 5 pursues *polypragmosyne*, which is the word used in the *HO* to describe the desire of the Athenian democrats to assert their independence by fomenting the Corinthian War. It is argued that the *HO* adopts a definition of the concept that is basically Thucydidean, but narrower. It is also argued that the Athenians are unlikely to have shown *polypragmosyne* at that stage in their history, so that the *HO* has projected the quality back on that era from his own time. Conon is not credited with *polypragmosyne*, even though the *HO* says that the democrats supported him, and even though later sources represented him as one of the architects of the new (and essentially polypragmatic) fourth-century Athenian empire. That seems odd.

Chapters 6 and 7 argue that the *HO* turned away from Thucydides' view of the centrality of the sea in the creation of hegemony toward the centrality of the land. Evidence is found in its apparent focus of the surviving fragments on the land, its digression on the Boeotian federation, and its interest in the land base at Decelea in the Peloponnesian War. There is an extended examination of the digression on the Boeotian federation, which is, however, conducted largely on its own terms rather than in relation to hegemony. The rest of the chapter is on the importance of land hegemony in Xenophon and Diodorus Siculus.

Chapter 8 presses the argument for Thucydidean influence by claiming that the *HO* has 'constant recourse' to an explanatory mode that echoes the way in which Thucydides opposes *prophasis* (underlying cause) and *aitia* (alleged cause) in his famous analysis of the origins of the Peloponnesian War. But it

first muddies the water by establishing that these meanings are not fixed, i.e. that *prophasis* can mean either the underlying *or* the alleged cause. And it is not promising for the Thucydidean thesis that on the only occasion on which the *HO* uses *prophasis*, it means ‘pretext’ to cover ‘true intention’, which is found in many writers other than Thucydides. The word *prophasis* does not occur in the other alleged remoulding of Thucydides’ causal thought, in the passage on the outbreak of the Corinthian War, and *aitia* is used in a different sense too. The chapter then examines the concept of blame and responsibility in the *HO* and the (un-Thucydidean) preference for personal over collective responsibility. The clash between the seen and unseen in causal explanations is found to be another feature of the work, and the form this takes when hidden motives are clarified is thought to come from Thucydides, though it is admitted to have deep roots in Greek literature. Other causal factors considered are the stereotype of the Thebans as manipulative and the phenomenon of *stasis*, in which the *HO* is said to share common ground with both Thucydides and Xenophon.

Chapter 9 explores the equation of ‘responsibility’ with ‘blame’ in the *HO* and the distinction between the ‘explanatory’ and ‘moralising’ mode in Thucydides, Xenophon, Theopompus, and Ephorus. This leads to the conclusion that judgments in the *HO* that could imply moral blame have mainly explanatory power as ‘responsibility’ and are therefore more like those of Thucydides. But this may even be true of the more overtly moralising historians, where even punishment by the gods is explanatory, though with an obvious moral dimension.

This volume offers quite bold conclusions about the *HO*, which some might want to assess more cautiously, in the light of the fragmentary nature of the *HO* itself and the incomplete picture we have of the tradition of historical writing in its time. For instance, if we had the whole text of the *HO*, we might have more information on what was happening at sea that might modify the volume’s argument that the *HO* had more interest in events on land, and more on Conon that would modify the argument that he was not intent on advancing Athens’ imperial interests. The argument for the influence of Thucydides and Xenophon might also need modification if we could compare the other historians available to the *HO*, but now lost to us. Sometimes too, the authors against whom the *HO* is measured take on a life of their own beyond the point of relevance. The comparisons between them and the *HO* do nevertheless broaden our understanding of the place of the *HO* in the tradition of Greek historical writing, and do offer fresh perspectives even where they may need more cautious assessment.