

REVIEW

ZEITSGECHICHTE THROUGH THE AGES

Valérie Fromentin, ed., *Écrire l'histoire de son temps, de Thucydide à Ammien Marcellin*. Entretiens sur l'antiquité Classique 67. Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 2022. Pp. 440. Hardback, CHF 55.00. ISBN 978-2-600-00767-2.

How did an ancient historian discuss events in which he himself was implicated, as witness or actor? Is there a detectable difference between the history of one's own times and that of ancient times within antiquity? These are the questions which exercise the nine contributors to this volume, sixty-seventh in the *Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique*, edited by Valérie Fromentin.

The result of a workshop of the same name held at the Fondation Hardt amid the difficulties caused by Covid-19 in August 2021, this edited volume with 'discussions' after each chapter provides a lively and thematically unified account of the various approaches taken by historians of their own times in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds, as well as the challenges faced in terms of terminology and categorisation within the history of scholarship. Each article is preceded by a brief abstract in English, while the chapters employ the preferred language of each contributor (including French, German, English, and Italian). The discussions appended to each contribution, equally multilingual, play an important role in binding the volume together: similar themes and questions emerge in response to the wide range of ancient authors discussed, so that the book feels like an extended conversation, the reader a privileged eavesdropper.

The volume begins with a brief preface by Pierre Ducrey, contextualising the *Entretiens* within the history and practice of the Fondation Hardt, before Valérie Fromentin's introduction, which makes explicit the volume's critical engagement with the subgenre employed by Felix Jacoby in his monumental *Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*. *Zeitgeschichte* is a term which Jacoby uses to describe the work of Thucydides, and then, by analogy, all historiographical writing which deals with events *in* or *up to* the historian's own time. This two-fold definition, with its problems, opens up the implicitly comparative insight which shapes the volume: *l'histoire de son temps* can only be defined against *l'histoire des autres temps*.

In light of Jacoby's influence over the category, and the absence of any equivalent term in Greek or Latin, it is helpful that the volume begins with Guido Schepens' chapter placing Jacoby's choice and definition of the term

within the broader context of historical scholarship. This acts almost as a second introduction, as he argues that it was precisely at a time when the academic practice of history had rejected the possibility of *Zeitgeschichte* in its own time that Jacoby defined it as an important category for organising the ancient fragments in his collection, thus creating the appearance of a distinct genre in the ancient world. Schepens goes on to suggest that the unifying feature of the texts involving contemporary history is a question of practice, rather than a distinct genre equivalent to ethnography or genealogy. This emphasis on practice, alongside self-definition, re-emerges throughout the volume.

The history of scholarship is similarly the topic of the final article in the collection, by Herve Inglebert: this contribution traces developments in the notion of universal history from antiquity to the present day, reflecting on the reasons why historians at particular moments find a broader, or longer, view necessary in order to explain ‘their own times’, from Polybius, who acts as a sort of linchpin within the argument, to the grand narratives of Marx and Hegel, the academic universal histories of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by Oncken, Flathe, or Heltmot, to twenty-first century anxiety about the preservation of voices and stories, and the increasingly influential idea of ‘global’, rather than ‘universal’ history. The bookending of the volume with articles about the discipline of history itself makes it particularly self-aware and compelling.

The remaining chapters are united by a focus on the ancient texts, while employing some diversity in choice of materials and approach. One group deals with texts which are generally regarded as contemporary history, and analyses authorial approaches and implicit concerns (e.g., Marincola on the ‘anxieties’ of the contemporary historian, Kemezis on the end-dates chosen by Roman imperial historians, Fromentin on the contemporary sections of universal histories, or Bleckmann on Ammianus as a representative of late antique contemporary history), while others use the lens of contemporary history to examine texts from other genres (thus Nicolai on the impact of epic on the genre of war monograph, Becker on the gospels and Acts, or Luraghi on certain Athenian honorific decrees).

In the first group, John Marincola’s analysis of the apparently bold claims made by contemporary historians about their own work reveals underlying anxiety about their methods (can eyewitnesses really be trusted?), potential for accusations of bias (clearly of significance by the time of Polybius—perhaps in response to the historians of Alexander), and the possibility that the apparent importance of the events they describe will be judged differently in the future. Adam Kemezis follows a similar approach—interrogating the claims made by the imperial historians Tacitus, Velleius, and Dio, and suggesting that within their explanations for the end-points of their histories we can identify implicit claims about the nature of contemporary history within the Roman imperial context—Tacitus, claiming that he writes in a happy era of freedom,

nevertheless does not bring his history up to the times of Trajan, implicitly demonstrating that the historian's freedom is always limited when it comes to describing his own times in an imperial system; Velleius' praise of Tiberius is striking in its focus on the period before his sole rulership, with similar implications. In contrast, Dio's willingness to write about the emperor Alexander is reflective of a disintegrating political culture in which what is written and who reads it has less value or significance than it did before.

Valérie Fromentin, dealing with a related question, analyses the contemporary portions of extended 'universal' histories, seeking shifts in style, structure, and authorial pose to reflect the change in the nature of the sources, as the subject shifts to the historian's own times, when he becomes the *primus auctor*. She finds different approaches in different historians: Diodorus, for example, makes no change to his style once he reaches the history of his own times, while Dio very clearly marks his own entrance into the narrative, each reflecting his own complex relationship with his immediate audience. Bruno Bleckmann's article on Ammianus then reveals how even an author whose narrative is primarily based on the prolific textual production of late antique bureaucracy, nevertheless places himself in the tradition of Thucydides by referring to eyewitnesses and autopsy, even as those parts of his text which deal with his own times (e.g., the reign of the emperor Julian) are based not on his own research, but on previous accounts, reflecting a quick and early willingness to mythologise and idealise this emperor. These articles deal closely and revealingly with authorial comments in the light of the details within their historical narrative.

The other set of articles brings in texts from outside the genre of literary historical prose. Roberto Nicolai discusses the way the early war monograph responds to epic, particularly the *Iliad*, pointing to the authors' tendency to emphasise the uniqueness and magnitude of the events they describe, with wars of their own times pointing back to the Trojan archetype, while also employing recognisable type-scenes and overarching narrative structures. Epic serves as a model both for the extraordinary, that which is worth hearing about, and that which is normative—a reflection of patterns of behaviour and discourse which are understood to be universal and repeated. Eve-Marie Becker's article brings the texts of early Christianity into the mix, focusing on aspects of the synoptic gospels and Luke-Acts, and associating them with *Zeitgeschichte* in the sense that, even if not written by those contemporary with events, they serve to explain their own times with reference to a new temporality, founded on the beginning of cosmic end-times (Mark) or within the paradigm of salvation history (Luke). The gospel writers' lack of interest in political events, as compared with someone like Josephus (even the destruction of the Jerusalem temple has cosmic, rather than political, importance in their scheme) reveals this distinctive new structuring of time. Finally, Nino Luraghi examines contemporary history in Attic inscriptions, observing the increase in

narrative justifying-clauses in the age of Alexander in light of the close relationship which develops between democratic discourse and stone decrees, suggesting that these texts are a reflection of decree writers seeking to write the history of their own times quite consciously, aware that these highly visible and permanent texts will hold particular authority.

Throughout the volume, certain themes emerge and re-emerge both in the contributions and the appended discussions. First, the extent to which contemporary history is *personal*, something which is particularly clear in comparison with inscriptions or the gospels—where the author is anonymous, reflecting these texts as intended to be representative of a kind of unanimity and communal effort which is quite different from the authorial authority claimed by most ancient historians, who emphasise their own control of their texts (with the anxieties and complexities which this produces).

Second, there is throughout an emphasis on the *practice* of contemporary history as distinct in terms of its source-base, and its place as a potential resource for future historians, even though this latter aspect is hardly mentioned by the ancient writers themselves. Indeed, even though historians of their own times emphasise their own research activities, contributors note repeatedly that their narratives are particularly smooth, concealing the arduous process of research (this is most clearly indicated in Marincola's deft comparison of the prologue to Josephus' *Jewish War* with his account of his own historical activities in the *Life*).

The final topic emerges clearly in the discussions, but is not discussed as fully as one might wish in the chapters themselves: this is the issue of audience—the significance of the first audience whom the writers had in mind as they composed their contemporary history. Related is the process of 'publication', and how authors release their texts to its first audience: Lucian's account of history 'readings' in the imperial period (*Hist. conscr.* 14–15), and the associated relationship between the written text and oral performance, is something which perhaps deserves further interrogation in diachronic perspective, with particular importance for the contemporary historian whose audience may include those mentioned in his work.

Overall, this volume brings together some incisive and detailed analysis of a form of history writing which, as the articles about the history of historical scholarship makes clear, is ubiquitous and even perhaps distinctive within Greek and Roman antiquity. As a resource for those interested in ancient historiography, with a specific and fairly narrow focus, while embracing the diversity of the ancient world, this book is a valuable addition to the scholarship, its four-part index, of authors, inscriptions, names, and themes, enabling ease of reference.