

REVIEW

A COMMENTARY ON DIODORUS AND THE *DIADOCHI*

Alexander Meeus, *The History of the Diadochoi in Book XIX of Diodoros' Bibliothēkē: A Historical and Historiographical Commentary*. Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2022. Pp. xii + 625. Hardback, \$149.99. ISBN 978-3-110-74195-7.

Writing a comprehensive commentary on even a single book of a major ancient work in the modern scholarly landscape, which sees an ever-growing number of contributions from all around the world, has become a gargantuan task. At the same time commentaries remain extremely useful and appreciated research tools. Luckily, the difficulty of the task has not deterred modern scholars from attempting to provide the readers with new commentaries to the work of Diodorus Siculus, whose *Bibliothēkē historikē* is the longest surviving example of Hellenistic historiography. Italian scholars in particular have been working for some time now on a series of commentaries to (mostly) individual books, with the latest addition covering narrative of the history of the Diadochi in Books 19–20.¹ As luck would have it, the very next year brought the publication of the first commentary in English on the history of the Diadochi in the Book 19, written by Alexander Meeus.

The two volumes can hardly be compared in a fair way. Landucci's commentary to Book 19 is about 170 pages long, compared to 440 pages in Meeus' volume, which leaves the latter with much more room for extended discussions and allows him to be more liberal in his choices of *what* to comment on in the first place.² The result is a much more detailed and thorough commentary,

¹ This vast project was started almost two decades ago by Delfino Ambaglio, with the first volume being published in 2008 (D. Ambaglio, F. Landucci, and L. Bravi, *Diodoro Siculo, Biblioteca Historica. Commento storico. Introduzione generale* (Milan)). The most recent title, which overlaps with the book under review, is F. Landucci, *Diodoro Siculo, Biblioteca Historica. Libri XIX–XX. La Grecia e l'Oriente. Commento storico* (Milan, 2021).

² The two commentaries reflect different approaches to structuring the commentary, perhaps influenced by the constraints of the volume. Landucci frequently comments on sections of the narrative a few sentences long, covering a series of connected events, while

which will be at least as useful to the historians studying the Diadochi and probably more useful to researchers interested in Diodorus as well as students beginning their academic journey.

Meeus' volume is organised into two parts. The first one, entitled 'Diodoros and His Work' (5–105), is divided into four chapters and provides readers with a general introduction to the key issues concerning Diodorus in general and Book 19 in particular. The second part (107–549) is the commentary itself.

Meeus opens his first part with a short chapter, not even two pages long, on Diodorus' biography (7–8). The briefness of this chapter is the first sign of what I consider one of the key strengths of this volume: Meeus' willingness to admit that there are some things we simply do not know, and to stick to what we do know rather than offer an elaborate yet debatable reconstruction. It is interesting that he sides with a relatively new (although in my opinion very convincing) interpretation that sees Diodorus as sympathetic to Pompey rather than Caesar.

Meeus' second chapter (9–57) discusses general features of Diodorus' work and his methods, starting with his conception of history. Meeus stands firmly behind the *Einquellentheorie*, demonstrating Diodorus' indirect use of sources and the repetitions, which Meeus attributes to errors in summarising a source (12–16). He goes on to discuss how Diodorus presents himself, starting from an analysis of the choice of the title, through the references to his predecessors, supposedly taken from a chronographic source, to a brief reflection on the use of polemic to give himself the appearance of a serious historian (16–25). The next substantial section, devoted to the selection of material (27–39), is very interesting, as this subject often receives less attention than it deserves. Meeus focuses on Diodorus' interest in lawgivers and on his fascination with the unexpected reversals of fortune. The arguments in this section are quite convincing, although one might have expected to find here a more straightforward statement concerning the reasons for including the story of Ballonymus, newly appointed king of Tyre, where Diodorus explicitly states that he chooses to include it 'because it is an example of a quite astonishing reversal of fortune' (17.46.6, trans. Geer). Instead, Meeus focuses on multiple examples from Books 18–20, which, while appropriate, lack the 'smoking gun' effect the story of Ballonymus provides.

Meeus often meticulously dissects each section into individual phrases, names, and words, providing each with an individual comment (see, e.g., section 69.1 provided with eight individual comments: pp. 433–6). As a result, Meeus provides his reader with easily accessible basic information on individual historical figures, including those less commonly known.

The section that follows, on the elaboration of material by Diodorus (39–42), is probably the one I find the least convincing. First of all, I do not find the examples chosen by Meeus particularly apt. Secondly—and more importantly—I think focusing solely on supposed errors and inconsistencies as evidence for Diodorus perpetuates an unfair image of him as a historian who is only capable of muddling and confusing his sources, although this is clearly not the case. The first example chosen by Meeus is the beginning of the battle of Paratacene, which according to him is described two times: at 19.26.10 and 19.30.1. Diodorus indeed says that Antigonos ‘drew it all up for battle and marched down in awe-inspiring array against the enemy’ and only after describing the array of both armies (19.27–9) begins the description of the actual fighting at 19.30.1. While this might create an impression that the battle started two times, I think there is a perfectly reasonable explanation for why the seemingly superfluous information at 19.26.10 is in fact necessary. It concludes the account of the strategem of Antigonos’ that allowed him to catch up with Eumenes: he chased him with his cavalry force, which created the impression of an entire army approaching and forced Eumenes to draw up his army and accept battle. The full section 19.26.10 reads ‘In any case, Antigonos by this device prevented the enemy from going forward while securing for himself a respite in which to bring up his army, and then when the army arrived, he drew it all up for battle and marched down in awe-inspiring array against the enemy’, and as such it underlines precisely what Antigonos gained through his deception: opportunity to draw up his forces and attack the enemy.

The second example (40–1) comes from Book 11 and concerns Xerxes’ preparations for the invasion of Greece. Meeus takes issue with Diodorus’ statements that the workers were sent to dig the canal through the Athos peninsula and bridge the Hellespont after Xerxes’ force had been assembled, and that ‘the men who had been sent to make ready these works completed them with dispatch, because so many labourers co-operated in the task’ (Diod. 11.2.4). Meeus considers this a clear contradiction of Herodotus’ account, according to which these works were conducted as a part of Xerxes’ four years of preparations (Hdt. 7.20, cf. Diod. 11.2.2 which gives a three year period of preparations) and attributes it to Diodorus wanting to use his favourite phrase for expedited work (11.2.4: οἱ μὲν οὖν πεμφθέντες ἐπὶ τὴν κατασκευὴν τῶν ἔργων ταχέως ἤγνουσιν διὰ τὴν πολυχειρίαν τῶν ἐργαζομένων).

Both engineering tasks (the canal through Athos and the bridge over the Hellespont) are dealt with together in Diodorus’ short description (11.2.2–4, about a page in the Loeb edition), even though their fates, as we know them from Herodotus, were markedly different. The bridge over the Hellespont was famously destroyed by a storm (Hdt. 7.35), and construction of a new bridge was necessary after Xerxes’ army was already in Sardis. This was, as far as we

can tell, indeed built very swiftly (Hdt. 7.36). I would argue that in this case Diodorus can be indeed criticised for insensitive abbreviation of the story, but not necessarily for distorting the account by using a stereotypical formula.

Therefore, I do not feel the examples chosen by Meeus indeed demonstrate Diodorus' clear errors, or indeed that these errors are likely to confuse the reader—but that may be due to my more sympathetic disposition towards Diodorus. It is worth noting, however, that the section makes no mention of the instances where Diodorus' creativity can be demonstrated in a more positive manner, which results in a one-sided discussion of this issue.³

Meeus proceeds to a discussion of Diodorus' language and style in section 2.3 and the text of Book 19 in section 2.4. The former is of particular interest as Meeus' analysis using the *TLG* shows interesting distribution patterns of some phrases throughout the work. While the importance of such a clustering of phrases is not necessarily clear at this point, it is certainly an intriguing observation.

The next chapter (58–90) is devoted to a discussion of the sources of Book 19. Meeus reviews the possible sources of the Diadochi narrative (Hieronymus of Cardia, Duris of Samos, Diyllus of Athens and Hecataeus of Abdera), but after a detailed analysis he concludes that the problem defies a clear solution and that no compelling argument for any one source over the others can be made on the basis of our limited evidence. This approach seems to be preferable to arguing for a certain source (especially in the commentary), considering how little evidence we have.⁴

The fourth and last chapter of the introduction discusses the complex issue of the chronology of the years 317–311 (101). Meeus gives an account of different chronologies suggested in the scholarship, and ultimately offers his own interpretation. On this issue it is definitely worth consulting also Landucci's commentary—not just because her chronology differs from Meeus', but also because she seems to discuss some aspects (e.g., the Babylonian *Diadochoi Chronicle*) in more detail.⁵ The chapter is accompanied by helpful chronological tables (102–5).

³ One such example could be his use of Agatharchides of Cnidus in 3.47.8, where he apparently changed the message of the moral lesson he took from his source. See L. Hau, 'Diodoros' Use of Agatharchides' Description of Africa', in M. Coltelloni-Trannoy and S. Morlet, edd., *Histoire et géographie chez les auteurs grecs (République et Empire)* (Paris, 2017) 27–41, at 38.

⁴ See also Landucci (n. 1 above) xi–xxi, who argues for Duris of Samos as the main source for the narrative of the Diadochi.

⁵ Landucci (n. 1 above) xxii–xxxv and chronological table at xlii–xliv. See also, e.g., Landucci's detailed discussion of the chronology of Demetrius' campaign in Babylonia (161–9).

The next 440 pages (109–549) are occupied by the commentary itself. The commentary is organised into smaller sections, consisting usually of a few chapters and connected thematically. Each section is introduced with a brief overview of its content, including references to the modern literature on the subject in question. The individual entries are organised in a standard and clear way, each new entry introduced with the Greek sentence from the *Bibliothēkē* in bold font, which greatly facilitates navigating throughout the text and finding the relevant information.

The historical comments are comprehensive and provide a reader with an overview of the scholarship on the issue, highlighting the key positions. Of course, some details are discussed in more depth than others (see, e.g., the location of the **Καρῶν κῶμαι** (132–4); the description of Peucestas' banquet (208–14); or the entry on the Nemean games, (416–18)), but only occasionally are they restricted to a reference to some other source.

The commentary lives up to the promise made in the title, as it does not limit itself to the purely historical notes. Researchers studying Diodorus and his work will find this commentary extremely useful, thanks to Meeus' decision to analyse recurring themes and vocabulary not merely in the context of Book 19, but also with reference to the entire *Bibliothēkē*. That way the historiographical comments allow the reader to recognise and appreciate the role of important themes such as *φιλανθρωπία* (202–3) and *ἀθάνατος δόξα* (359) in the work. The focus on characteristic phrases representative of Diodorus' language is a useful contribution for anyone interested in Diodorus' method of work, especially in case of terms clearly originating with the author, such as *ἀναγκαῖος* (151). Some of these analyses are very thorough and offer evidence and observations on Diodorus' practice in general (e.g., the discussion of the use of exact numbers of days, 200–2). Making full use of these remarks is made significantly easier thanks to the *Index Graecitatis* which lists all the terms and phrases discussed (620–5).

In conclusion, Meeus' commentary to the history of the Diadochi in Book 19 of the *Bibliothēkē Historikē* is a very successful execution of a challenging task. The commentary offers a balanced discussion of the issues, and refers the reader to the ample bibliography (552–617). Meeus' decision to focus on the more recent publications allowed it to remain manageable. At the same time, the breadth of the library research should not go unnoticed: I was pleasantly surprised to find a number of works in Polish included in the bibliography.⁶

⁶ In my opinion the most up-to-date analysis of Diodorus' method in Polish can be found (a bit counterintuitively) in the introduction to Malinowski's translation of Agatharchides of Cnidus (G. Malinowski, *Agatharchides z Knidos, Dzieje* (Wrocław, 2007)), but its absence from

While I hold a different view on many aspects of Diodorus' *Bibliothēkē*, I believe that this commentary has two important and rare qualities. Firstly, it is honest about the things we do not know about Diodorus and his work, refraining from forcing a conclusion (e.g., regarding the sources of Book 19) where we simply lack the evidence. Secondly, and more importantly, it manages to analyse the details of the *Bibliothēkē* without losing sight of the whole. It is due to these qualities, regardless of our differences of opinion on specific issues, that I find Meeus' observations, the questions he asks, and the ways in which he tries to answer them stimulating and creative. This is why I would recommend this commentary also to researchers dealing primarily with other parts of the *Bibliothēkē Historikē*.

Jagiellonian University

ANDRZEJ DUDZIŃSKI
andrzej.dudzinski@uj.edu.pl

the bibliography does not by any means diminish the credit due to the diligence of Meeus' inquiry.