DOI: https://doi.org/10.29173/histos687 *Histos* 18 (2024) CII–CIX

REVIEW–DISCUSSION

REVISITING MARINCOLA'S *AUTHORITY AND TRADITION*

K. Scarlett Kingsley, Giustina Monti, and Tim Rood, edd., *The Authoritative Historian: Tradition and Innovation in Ancient Historiography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. Pp. xvi + 475. Hardback, £105.00/$135.00. ISBN 978-1-009-15945-6.

I learned a great deal from reading the papers in this edited volume, which is dedicated to honouring and exploring the themes of John Marincola's *Authority and Tradition in Ancient Historiography* (1997). In what follows, I summarise the nineteen papers and offer a short and positive appraisal.

PART I: Myth, Fiction, and the Historian's Authority

In the opening article, 'Seven Types of Fiction in the Greek Historians', Michael Flower explores the fictions inherent in creating narrative descriptions of historical events, since writers must condense, expand, or invent (speeches, for instance) in order to create their historical and moral stories. Nor do statements of method necessarily guide the historians' response to the events, an observation offered also by Cartledge and Pelling in this volume. As examples of creative expansion, he offers the Throne Room debate in Herodotus or the Melian dialogue in Thucydides. Omissions are of course harder: Flower mentions the problem of over- and under-reading omissions (33, 37). As examples, he offers the traditional complaints against Thucydides for omitting more detailed descriptions of Spartan pre-war diplomacy and the Athenian response to it, or for slighting the Megarian decree. How we read these 'omissions' or whether we even think of them as omissions greatly depends on our attitude toward the historian.

The next contribution, Nino Luraghi's 'Folktale and Local Tradition in Charon of Lampsacus', applies the methodology of folklore studies to the fragments of Charon of Lampsacus, with revealing and vivid results. He retells the stories of three opaque and difficult fragments of Charon, each of which he as far as possible puts in historical context and then analyses according to the fragment's similarities to comparable folklore. He convincingly concludes that the fragments reflect local tradition 'which comes to us in the form of

ISSN: 2046-5963 Copyright © 2024 Edith Foster 28 November 2024

highly sophisticated narratives, in which folktale motifs and story types are deployed and manipulated for aesthetic as well as broadly political purposes …' (58). He concludes with a comparison to Herodotus, who fleshes out the details of his stories much more fully than Charon. 'Charon's narrative reads more like a script that an oral storyteller would need to expand upon in a major way in order to turn the written text into successful oral performance' (60). This essay is ground-breaking and seems to me to allow for a much better understanding of the extant fragments of Charon.

Tim Rood's paper on 'Mythical and Historical Time in Herodotus: Scaliger, Jacoby, and the Chronographic Tradition' follows. It offers a many-layered critique of scholarship on Herodotus. Rood argues that the question of the opposition of myth and history in Herodotus has been framed in misunderstood terms that have led us to a distorted view of this ultimately nonsensical question. He goes back to the origin of the term *spatium historicum* in the works of the chronographer Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540–1609), who reduced Varro's tripartite understanding of historical time to the 'mythical' and 'historical' dichotomy, although Scaliger still understood mythical time as a period susceptible to rational analysis. It is only more recent scholarship that has divided the mythological from the historical, and therefore arrived at analyses that make little sense when applied to Herodotus and which serve 'progressivist accounts of historiography's liberation from myth' (79). Rood's cogent presentation liberates us from the burdens of an established error.

Like Rood, A. J. Woodman's 'Myth and History in Livy's Preface' criticises modern scholarship. He usefully compares four translations of sentences 6–8 of Livy's preface, in which Livy outlines his relation to ancient traditions. He concludes that '… none of the four translations seems to me to bear the slightest resemblance to Livy's Latin' (89). He offers his own translation (94), along with some suggestions for solving interpretive difficulties. His argument that previous translations were not accurate is convincing and chastening, showing the importance of a well-informed and independent reading of such programmatic statements.

PART II: Dislocating Authority in Herodotus' *Histories*

This set of contributions on Herodotus begins with Scott Scullion's 'Herodotus as Tour Guide: The Autopsy Motif', offering a refreshing rethink of those passages in Herodotus where the historian claims the authority of autopsy. Scholars have offered complex arguments to show either that Herodotus' actual presence was possible on each occasion when he claims to have seen things for himself, or that he is a liar, but Scullion shows that these ingenious defences or attacks on the historian are not necessary, since 'the autopsy motif',

i.e., a rhetorical claim of personal presence, brought vividness and trustworthiness to Herodotus' accounts, without him actually having had to be present on each occasion. 'I stress the distinction between genuine, extra-narrative personal experience, on the one hand, and description of experiences as narrative function, on the other, and argue that for Herodotus the latter is not contingent on and need not correspond to the former' (120). A stronger relation to Kingsley's paper on the deployment of the second-person singular (i.e., the insertion of the imagined *reader* into the text) could have been drawn here, but this paper is enlightening.

Carolyn Dewald follows up with 'Interpreting Uncertainty in Herodotus' *Histories*', exploring how Herodotus encourages readers to make and reassess their own judgements. She begins with a description of Plutarch's intolerance for this very procedure, which seemed to him malicious and immoral. Following Richard Rutherford's analysis of Herodotean irony, she discusses 'dramatic irony' (also sometimes called 'discrepant awareness', since text internal or external focalisers know significantly more or less that the historical agents), 'historical irony' (when the end of a story shows its meaning), and the ironies of failed communication, in which interlocutors remain ignorant despite informing each other. These Herodotean modes, so repulsive to Plutarch, are the very reason why we love Herodotus now; Dewald's essay is a welcome defence.

Richard Rutherford's essay '"It is No Accident That …": Connectivity and Coincidence in Herodotus' logically follows Dewald's. Rutherford offers a typically suggestive essay on Herodotus' narration of accidents and coincidences. He offers an open-ended definition of coincidence ('part of my object is to suggest that the borderline between coincidence and other phenomena is hazy', 141) as 'a combination of two or more events in space and time that though apparently unconnected can be seen as significant when considered together' (141). His aim is to relate the narration of coincidences to Herodotus' historical project (142). After discussing the relationship of coincidence, causality, and explanation in the Presocratics and Aristotle, Rutherford offers a statement of the importance of his theme for historiography: 'causation and explanation are the essence of historical writing … within that framework coincidence has an ambiguous status. The effect is clear, but there is no obvious cause. Hence the need to supply it—or imply it' (152). His examples show that Herodotus' coincidences admit or require a variety of explanations, as they are read or reread, evidence for Dewald's argument, as well as his own.

Closing this section, Deborah Boedeker's 'Through Barbarian Eyes: Non-Greeks on Greeks in Herodotus' focusses on Herodotus' casting of 'the *rhetorical* dimension of cultural differentiation by having characters in the narrative express their judgment of another group', analysing in particular the narrative device of 'barbarians looking at Greeks' (158). She shows that 'the way an

"outsider" describes the Greeks, or anticipates their behaviour, is largely subjective' (170), and that their statements reveal cultural characteristics in '*both* directions' (176, emphasis original), i.e., the statements both characterise the speakers and also show the Greeks from a variety of perspectives.

PART III: Performing Collective and Personal Authority

To begin Part III, Lucia Athanassaki's 'Singing and Dancing Pindar's Authority' is an ambitious paper on poetic authority that examines, on the basis of many examples, 'Pindar's holistic take on authority, that is, authoritative content, melody, and dance, an authority modelled on divine *choreia*' (181). Prominent in her analysis is the role of the *charites*, or graces, which 'broadly designate the divine, and therefore authoritative, quality of choral performance and its appeal' (191). Ultimately, Athanassaki argues, Pindar produced his performances in cooperation with the Graces and Muses, as well as with a Panhellenic selection of human singers and dancers, a fact that enhanced the appeal and authority of his poetry.

Next, K. Scarlett Kingsley's 'Experience and the Vicarious Traveller in Herodotus' *Histories*' offers a useful analysis of Herodotus' use of the second-person singular. Addressing, for instance, one of the same passages Scott Scullion had analysed, namely Herodotus' account of the weakness of Persian and corresponding strength of Egyptian skulls (3.12), she shows how the use of the second person appeal to the reader (in addition to the first person claim actually to have visited the battlefield) helps to establish 'a circuit of consent between the narrator, the narratee, and the actual reader' (215) of this highly ironic and opaque description. (From my point of view, then, Herodotus hilariously compels us to fake consent to this description, sharpening the humour of the passage.) A further passage that begins with claims of autopsy, the voyage up the Nile (2.29) also engages the reader with second-person address. The result is vivid: 'In so far as the actual reader adopts the position of the narratee, hearsay is translated into a phenomenological episode of virtual travel' (217). Kingsley comments on the immersive quality of the deployment of the second-person singular, a feature, as she mentions, long noted in Homer, and on double deixis, where the identification of 'you' may shift (222).

Harriet Flower with her article titled '*Veni, vidi, vici*: When did Roman Politicians Use the First-Person Singular?' moves the focus to the use of the first-person singular among a small group of Roman aristocrats of the late second century BCE. The broad use of the first-person singular across a variety of genres (as Flower shows from inscriptional and epistolary evidence) was well established. It could therefore be used both to affirm adherence to traditional values or also to distance oneself as a critic; she suggests that the use of the first

person became more frequent as the second century neared its end and the debate over, for instance, the fate of Tiberius Gracchus, grew more intense. Thus a brief comparison of the oratory of Gaius Gracchus with that of Cato the Elder shows that the use of the first-person singular in oratory was traditional before either Tiberius or Gaius Gracchus began their careers, so that the more intensive use of the first-person singular in the late second century followed from previous paradigms, but nevertheless revealed that the tone of Roman politics was becoming more divisive.

Finally for Part III, Frances Titchener's 'Self-Praise and Self-Presentation in Plutarch' usefully renews five of John Marincola's avenues of approach to the historian's authority, applying his questions to Plutarch. 'References to gods and fortune', 'pretences of necessity', 'commonness of action', 'praise in the mouth of others', and 'magnification of actions' (258) are examined one by one, with examples that show how Plutarch employed these devices.

PART IV: Generic Transformations

Paul Cartledge's 'Thucydides' Mytilenean Debate: Political Philosophy or Authoritative History?' addresses a question I have often wondered about, which is why Thucydides' *Methodensatz* ('statement of method') does not seem to govern his method. Cartledge's example is the Mytilenean debate between Cleon and Diodotus: what is history here and what is philosophical exploration? As he says: 'the enduring quality of Thucydides' speeches does not seem to me to depend chiefly on their factual accuracy' (269). This is surely true, and at the same time surely not in conflict with his argument that Thucydides is an ancestor of the modern historical sciences (269). As a corroborating argument, one might offer the observation that the text of Thucydides is only about 25 percent speeches: Thucydides devotes less of his text to speeches than Herodotus, and far less than the 50 percent of Homeric epic. Like Rutherford's essay, this essay is suggestive, renewing and enlarging on familiar themes in a productive way.

As the book moves on to Hellenistic and Roman authors, the late Kurt Raaflaub's excellent contribution, titled 'Tradition, Innovation, and Authority: Caesar's Historical Ambitions', would be a useful reading for any upper-level undergraduate or beginning graduate course on Caesar's *Commentaries*. It begins with valuable historical background; especially useful are the paragraphs on Caesar's various communications with the senate (274–7). It continues with a brief note on Caesar's models, especially Thucydides, and then suggests reasons for the style of Caesar's commentaries, which emulated the writing of history in order to create a story that was 'attractive, dramatic, and easy to read' (276–7). Caesar's aim was to reach a broader audience:

'Caesar wrote in a clear, simple, but elegant style that would be understandable to Romans of all classes' (278). The bulk of the paper discusses twelve different ways in which Caesar utilised narrative techniques typical of the historiography of Herodotus and Thucydides, and offers a thorough introduction to Caesar's style and its context.

Next, Ewen Bowie in 'Tradition and Authority in Philostratus' *Lives of the Sophists*' discusses Philostratus' means of insinuating, asserting, and creating his authority as an interpreter of the lives and works of the sophists. Bowie examines Philostratus' management of references to his sources, which include eyewitnesses, hearsay, and written sources, which he sometimes quotes. Philostratus also establishes his style as a standard for others, criticising the style of his predecessors. In addition, Philostratus fronted his work with a dedicatory letter that signals to all readers his acquaintance with an important patron. Again, this informative essay offers important background for anyone heading into the study of Philostratus.

PART V: Innovation within Tradition

Despite the excellent contributions found in the earlier parts of this volume, the fifth and final section won the 'overall strongest section' award from this reviewer. It begins with Giustina Monti's '"When one assumes the *ethos* of writing history": Polybius' Historiographical Neologisms', a highly independent yet thoroughly studious reading of the neologisms Polybius invented in order to describe his own historiographical practice and that of others (see also Pelling in this volume on Polybius' 'put-downs'). Polybius' creativity as an author strongly emerges from the examples and explanations offered in this chapter. Beyond the explanation of Polybius' self-understanding as an historian, the take-away resembles that from A. J. Woodman's paper, since this paper also demonstrates how important it is to translate for oneself and pay attention to the meaning of the words.

Mark Toher's 'How Tradition is Formed: From the Fall of Caesar to the Rise of Octavian', on the traditions concerning the assassination of Julius Caesar is a strong contender for best volume paper. Beginning with an historical overview, Toher quickly proceeds to his purpose, namely, to compare evidence closely contemporary with the assassination of Julius Caesar, namely that of Nicolaus of Damascus and of Cicero, with the later tradition on this event, and then to expose four unhistorical episodes in Appian which, however, have found wide acceptance among modern scholars. A fascinating introduction to Nicolaus shows why his understanding of the assassination could have been acute. Nicolaus' conclusions, namely that 'the significant grievance of the conspirators was resentment of Caesar's *clementia*' (340), that Caesar was 'the imperceptive victim of ruthless and cunning enemies' (341)

and that the assassination was 'a crude, violent play for power within the Roman governing class, but one that went badly awry' (342) conflict with the accepted version of the events, which stems mostly from Plutarch and Appian. To conclude, Toher dissects his four unhistorical episodes in Appian. The heart of this paper is its presentation of Nicolaus of Damascus: Toher argues convincingly that the majority view of the Ides of March is not historical.

A valuable characteristic of many papers in this volume is that they put the narratives they examine in historical and literary context, however well known these may be. Rhiannon Ash, in her contribution 'Burn Baby Burn (*Disco* in Furneaux): Tacitean Authority, Innovation, and the Neronian Fire (*Annals* 15.38–9)' also follows this practice, opening with a useful discussion of fires at Rome and of the problem of writing disaster narratives, which had to find a balance between sensationalism and chronical (359). In what follows, she offers a close reading of Tacitus' narrative strategies in describing the great fire of AD 64, focusing, for instance, on the unfolding order of the narrative, which delays depicting the effect of the fire on the Roman people, and on Tacitus' enticing suggestions that Nero was not responsible. Through these and other devices Tacitus shows that he is a rational observer, who is above the rumours and panic of the event, and sets himself apart from the parallel accounts in Suetonius and Cassius Dio. Tacitus' ultimately damning appraisal of Nero, whom he indicts of taking advantage of the fire to build the Golden House (371), gains authority from his moderation in the earlier part of his narrative. This paper will be useful for anyone embarking on a serious study of Tacitus.

Christopher Pelling's closing essay on 'The Authority to be Untraditional' relates to many of the preceding papers, for instance, to Rutherford's paper on accidents and coincidences, Cartledge's paper on the *Methodsatz*, Monti's paper on Polybius, and Toher's paper on the assassination of Julius Caesar. It is perhaps placed last for this reason. One of Pelling's main ideas, namely that the character of historical events has an important influence on how historians can record and explain them, pertains to many of the papers. Pelling's sage unravelling of the ways in which Thucydides bounces off Herodotus ('as much an ally as a target', 381), many of whose main themes and preoccupations became Thucydides' own, founds an essay which reaches from Polybius, through Cassius Dio and Xenophon to Tacitus, and then to Plutarch. Like Monti, Pelling emphasises that Polybius supplies an 'unusually explicit statement of why a particular sort of historiography is needed to suit the events he will be describing' (382); as Monti showed, Polybius was aware of precisely Pelling's theme, namely that changing historical circumstances called for a new kind of historiography. Important individual observations arise from considering this issue: for instance, did Xenophon's *Hellenica* change character after the first two books because he stopped continuing Thucydides' story of the war, or because the 'texture of events' changed, and enforced a different style (384)? Skipping over much that is good in this paper, the short section on

Plutarch perhaps particularly deserves the reader's attention; Pelling points out Plutarch's persona as a 'learned historical virtuoso' (390) who was willing to argue with the historians at any moment, and thus quite unafraid to claim authority for his historical points.

In addition to the papers, the volume offers a brief but comprehensive Introduction, a thematic index, *index locorum*, and full bibliography. The editing of this long and complex volume is excellent.[1]

To conclude, this volume describes many differing examples of the inevitable interrelation between the construction of authority and the framing of events, between who sees and how they describe what they see. I graduated from reading these papers with the sense that I better understood the historians, and in some cases (cf. Luraghi's paper on Charon of Lampsacus) had begun to grasp an historian for the first time. While readers will turn first to the essays on the authors with whom they are presently engaging, the volume as a whole offers an impressive overview of the range of creative solutions by means of which Greek and Roman historians and other writers (e.g., Pindar, Philostratus) established persuasive credibility. It also offers a valuable review of principles and questions that we all need to keep in mind, together with some forceful criticisms of established views. I strongly recommend this rich collection of papers to anyone engaged in studying the ancient historians and their context.

EDITH FOSTER

College of Wooster EFoster@wooster.edu

[11] I saw a few errors. See page 258, where the word 'future' stands instead of the word 'figure' and page 373, where Kurt Raaflaub's chapter, Chapter 14, is meant to be cited.