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REVIEW–DISCUSSION

THEORIES OF THE SOUL IN POLYBIUS AND DIODORUS

Dirk Rohmann, *Psychologie in der hellenistischen Geschichtsschreibung*. Palingenesia 137. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2023. Pp. 239. Hardback, €56.00. ISBN 978-3-515-13473-6.

It may be useful to begin the review with the observation that this book is not about psychology in the modern sense of the word, but in the ancient sense of theories about the soul, *psychē*. It is also not about Hellenistic historiography in any broad or comprehensive sense, but focuses overwhelmingly on Polybius and Diodorus with only an occasional glance towards some of the more fragmentarily transmitted historiographers of the period. On the thorny question of Diodorus' relationship with his sources and the degree to which he took over their ideas as well as their summaries of events, the position taken is that, although Diodorus' *Bibliothēkē Historikē* largely consists of 'excerpts' from earlier works (e.g., p. 26 and 38), Diodorus chose these excerpts carefully, and his own views on the soul can be seen consistently throughout the work.

In the preface, Rohmann explains that the main part of the book was written during the COVID-19 lockdown and muses that this circumstance gave him peculiar *ataraxia* to complete the research in a focused way isolated from outer influences. This is, in fact, felt throughout the book, for good and ill. On the one hand, the book is a personal and careful reading of Polybius and Diodorus; on the other, it engages only with a fraction of the existing scholarly literature on the many topics on which it touches, and sometimes presents findings as new which are, in fact, more or less part of the current *communis opinio* on one or the other of these two historiographers. (One wonders if it is also the COVID-19 context that makes metaphors based on medicine, doctors, and disease loom large in several of the book's chapters, like a fascinating red thread running through the various discussions). Problematically, there are some odd absences from the bibliography; the discussion throughout would have benefitted from engagement especially with C. Durvye's article on 'The Role of the Gods in Diodorus' Universal History' and/or her detailed preface to the Belles Lettres edition of Diodorus book 20 as well as with the chapters on Polybius and Diodorus in L. I. Hau *Moral History*

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from Herodotus to Diodorus Siculus, and with C. Muntz *Diodorus and the World of the Late Roman Republic*.[1]

The book consists of an Introduction and Conclusion and five chapters: 1. 'The Historian as Doctor or Corruptor of the Soul'; 2. 'The Psychology of the Ruler in Polybius'; 3. 'The Psychological Effect of the Bad Ruler in Diodorus'; 4. 'Psychology of Warfare'; 5. 'The Soul's Interaction with the Divine'; 6. Conclusion. At the end is included a bibliography, divided into a section on text editions and one on scholarship, as well as an *index nominum*, an *index rerum*, and an *index locorum*.

The Introduction offers a brief overview of ancient theories of the soul from Herodotus through Plato, Thucydides, and tragedy up to the Hellenistic philosophical and medical schools. The overview is not intended to be exhaustive, but is meant to give the reader a bit of background knowledge of the various theories which the rest of the book will argue influenced Polybius' and Diodorus' views of the soul. It is shown that, by the Hellenistic period, it was common to think of the state as a larger equivalent of the human soul, where harmony should be created by justice, and where lack of harmony and justice could be described as insanity. The core thesis of the book is then set out: that the Hellenistic historiographers (i.e., Polybius and Diodorus) interpreted the decline of the Greek states and the rise of Rome as partly due to mass insanity spreading like an epidemic in the Greek world while the Romans avoided such tendencies.

Chapter 1, 'The Historian as Doctor or Corruptor of the Soul', investigates the *Histories* of Polybius and the *Bibliothēkē Historikē* of Diodorus for signs of influence by philosophical theories about the soul, its afterlife, or transmigration. It is argued that Polybius' views are largely Stoic, with his ideal statesman being closely akin to the Stoic Sage, whereas Diodorus' views are Pythagorean, including a belief in transmigration of the soul and human ability to receive prophetic dreams in a predetermined universe, making his approach

[1] C. Durvye, 'The Role of the Gods in Diodorus' Universal History: Religious Thought and History in the Historical Library', in L. I. Hau, A. Meeus, and B. Sheridan, edd., *Diodoros of Sicily: Historiographical Theory and Practice in the* Bibliothēkē (Leuven, 2018) 347–64 (no chapters in this lengthy volume are cited); C. Durvye, 'Notice', in ead. edd. *Diodore de Sicile, Bibliothèque Historique, livre XX* (Paris, 2018) VII–CLIV; L. I. Hau, *Moral History from Herodotus to Diodorus Siculus* (Edinburgh, 2016); C. Muntz, *Diodorus Siculus and the World of the Late Roman Republic* (Oxford, 2017). C. Baron, *Timaeus of Tauromenium and Hellenistic Historiography* (Cambridge, 2013) is in the bibliography, but does not appear in any of the (brief) discussions of Timaeus scattered throughout the book (e.g., p. 27–8, 30, 128–9), which is a shame since engagement with it would have added nuance to Rohmann's views on this Hellenistic author. It is more understandable that there is no engagement with two more recent volumes, which perhaps appeared too late to be taken into account: A. Meeus, *The History of the Diadochoi in Book XIX of Diodoros'* Bibliotheke (Berlin, 2022) and E. Nicholson, *Philip V of Macedon in Polybius' Histories* (Oxford, 2023).

to writing about the past not just one of historiography, but one of 'historical theology' (*Geschichtstheologie*). The chapter proceeds to discuss at length the parallels drawn by Polybius between history and medicine, demonstrating that he presents historiography as able to heal the soul in a similar way to a good doctor healing the body whereas bad historiography can harm the soul just like a bad doctor can harm the body. It is then demonstrated that Polybius sees close parallels between the soul of an individual and the soul of a community, and considers the characteristics of a ruler's soul to have a determining impact on the 'soul' of the community he leads, all of which makes the historiographer who tries to influence rulers and commanders responsible not only for the souls of these individuals, but for their communities as well. It is further argued that his ideal is a Stoic one of a soul with *ataraxia* and *apatheia*, which cannot be harmed by external influences, and that these qualities are, in Polybius' eyes, shown by the Roman state, making Rome the ideal community.

As for Diodorus, it is argued that both Stoic and Pythagorean ideas of the soul can be found in his work, but that the ideas of Pythagoras are more pervasive. Rohmann argues that Diodorus believed in an afterlife of the soul that would reward and punish the deeds done in life, and that he saw historiography as a parallel to this, handing out praise and blame to historical characters. Like Polybius, Diodorus is argued to have seen Rome as an ideal state, but in his case this was a divine reward for the Romans' piety since the rule of Numa.

The final five and a half pages of the chapter is entitled 'Plutarch and the fragments of the Greek historians'. It does not discuss any of the fragmentary historiographies in detail, but argues on the basis of a number of references to fragments from a range of authors (which are not quoted), that there was widespread interest in philosophical theories of the soul among Hellenistic historiographers, with ideas of transmigration dominating and the immortality of the soul taken for granted. Considering the title of the book, and the innovative contents of this argument, it would have been nice to see this section developed more fully, with quotations of the relevant fragments and proper discussion of the extent to which the views on the soul found therein can be shown to go back to the fragmentary authors rather than be a product of the author citing them (the cover text).

Chapter 2, 'The Psychology of the Ruler in Polybius', begins with discussions of some of the important characters in Polybius' *Histories* (Philip V, Aratus of Sicyon, Scipio the Elder and Younger) and finishes with a section on 'tyrants'. It focuses primarily on demonstrating that Polybius believed that men whose souls were inherently good (such as Philip V) would often be corrupted by bad advisors, and that the souls (or moral characteristics) of any leader would influence his army/state and 'infect' it with those same characteristics. Good leaders are the ones who have good souls and come close

to being Stoic Sages (e.g., Aratus of Sicyon), and they will transfer such qualities to their states, which will become better because of them, Rome being the best of all because of the qualities of the Scipios. None of this will be particularly surprising to Polybius scholars, although it is not usually framed in the context of theories of the soul.

Oddly, a large part of the chapter is taken up with a discussion of the reception of Polybius' portrait of the Scipios through Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*, Macrobius, Neoplatonism, and the Christian tradition (63–72). This is interesting, but has little bearing on our understanding of Polybius' own views, and would perhaps have been better saved for a final chapter on the afterlife of the theories of soul found in Hellenistic historiography. Another oddity is Rohmann's discussion of Polybius' narrative of the election to the aedileship of Lucius and Publius Scipio (the Elder), which relies on the assumption that Polybius leaves it open to interpretation whether or not Publius Scipio in fact had the dream he reports to his mother, of him and his brother winning the aedileship together (p. 72–4). In fact, Polybius is explicit that Scipio made the dream up in order to win over not just his mother, but the Roman populace too.[2] Nonetheless, Rohmann recognises that Polybius is more sceptical about prophetic dreams than some other historiographers, notably Alexander Polyhistor and Timaeus of Tauromenium. It would have been useful to provide a more in-depth discussion of the fragments of the latter in order to make this case.

The section on tyrants, conversely, argues that leaders with bad souls make their states bad, and also that they, like the good leaders discussed above, can be influenced by advisors and friends. Most of the section, however, is taken up with demonstrating how tyrants, to Polybius' satisfaction, tend to come to deservedly nasty ends. One might add that this goes much further than tyrants: Polybius' narrative world is one in which, by and large, good people do well and bad people come to grisly ends, and when it does not quite work out like that, Polybius voices his surprise and disappointment (as in the end of Abydos, Pol. 16.32).[3]

Chapter 3, 'The Psychological Effect of Bad Rulers in Diodorus', is structured as a chronological analysis of the *Bibliothēkē* from Book 1 through to the fragmentary final books. Its stated aim is to show the centrality in Diodorus' *Bibliothēkē* of the Pythagorean idea of inner harmony of a community being reached by means of the justice and peace of mind of its inhabitants (Rohmann recognises that this principle was also taken up by the Stoics and Epicureans,

[2] *ὧν οὐδὲν ἦν ἐνύπνιον, ἀλλ' ὑπάρχων εὐεργετικὸς καὶ μεγαλόδωρος καὶ προσφιλὴς κατὰ τὴν ἀπάντησιν συνελογίσατο τὴν τοῦ πλήθους πρὸς αὐτὸν εὔνοιαν*: 'These things were not due to a dream, but, being benevolent and generous and friendly in conversation, he had inferred [or perhaps: 'he had planned for'] the people's goodwill towards him.' Pol. 10.4.7.

[3] See Hau (above, n. 1) 23–72.

but argues that it is fundamentally Pythagorean and that Diodorus recognised it as such), but in reality it often becomes a more down-to-Earth discussion of how bad rulers have a bad influence on their states whereas good rulers improve them. Rohmann argues that Diodorus sees Pharaonic Egypt as a Golden Age in respect of justice and harmony whereas he represents the mythological age in Greece as characterised simultaneously by insanity and kin-killing on the one hand and, on the other, as a Golden Age in the time of Kronos, where justice was spread across the Greek world. It is shown that Sicily, Diodorus' native home, and Magna Graecia more widely, play an important part in this scheme, as an area where communities were built on principles of justice—in some cases set down directly by Pythagoras and his followers—from the outset. It is through turning away from such principles that these areas lost the goodwill of Providence and ended up ruled by Rome, the new just state. In order to connect this discussion with theories of the soul, Rohmann makes much of the expressions *ψυχῆς λαμπρότης*, 'brilliance of soul', and *μεγαλοψυχία*, 'greatness of soul', which Diodorus uses repeatedly to describe heroic characters. One may question whether they really mean anything more than 'great personality' and 'magnanimity/generosity' respectively, i.e., whether the sense of 'soul' in *ψυχή* was really felt in such expressions, and it would have been useful to include a systematic treatment of the two expressions in Diodorus in order to convince sceptics.

Overall, the argument works quite well for the mythological books and the part of the *Bibliothēkē* focused on the Archaic period, particularly in the section on lawgivers in Magna Graecia, which argues that Charondas, Zaleucos, and Dion were all aiming to improve the soul of their citizens through their laws (112–19). Scattered throughout the chapter is also found an interesting discussion of torture—in ancient Greece and more specifically in Diodorus—as a means to discover the truth, not just with regard to the facts in a criminal investigation, but more philosophically with regard to the truth about a person's soul. The overall argument, however, is less convincing when dealing with the Classical and Hellenistic periods, and it seems particularly tenuous for Book 17 on Alexander the Great (129–35). For Books 18–21, on Sicily in the Hellenistic period and the Wars of the Successors, the argument largely becomes about how unjust, greedy rulers/commanders have a bad influence on their states/armies and tend to come to sticky ends, and references to theories of soul more or less disappear (135–44). In the discussion of the fragmentary books focused on the Punic and Macedonian Wars (Books 23–34/5), Rohmann returns to the idea of the lawgiver trying to improve the soul of his citizens and argues that Rome can be seen to fulfil this function in Diodorus' narrative, particularly through the Scipios and Aemilius Paullus whereas the enemies of Rome are seen descending into insanity because of bad leadership (144–50). This may well be true, but it would have been useful

to present a systematic comparison of Diodorus' portrait of the Scipios and narrative of this time (as far as is possible from the fragmentary text) with that of Polybius in order to gauge to what extent Diodorus has taken over such ideas from his source and to what extent he seems to have made an effort to put a Pythagorean spin on Polybius' narrative.

Chapter 4, 'Psychology of Warfare', continues in the same vein, by demonstrating that both Polybius and Diodorus make the spiritual/moral qualities of a commander responsible for his army's morale and fighting ability and so consider these qualities to be a determining factor in a state's ability to expand by military means. Conversely, Polybius considers as insanity any (military) decision-making based on emotions, especially the desire for revenge, and especially if it leads to destruction of temples. None of this will come as a surprise to scholars of either historiographer. More innovative is a section on Diodorus' use of the metaphor of the commander as soul and the army as body (167–71). Leading on from this section, however, Rohmann discusses some passages of Diodorus which he labels 'tragic history' and argues that they are meant to lead to a tragic *katharsis* for the reader (172–5). Considering that *katharsis* is never used of historiography by Aristotle or any other ancient source, this seems quite a leap of faith, and not one that would be shared by many contemporary scholars of historiography.[4] Similarly, Rohmann's confident statement in the following discussion of the debate about the Athenian prisoners in Syracuse (Diod. 13.19–32) that Nicolaus is 'obviously the mouthpiece of Diodorus' seems to hark back to an earlier era of less narrative-aware scholarship on ancient historiography (176).

Chapter 5, 'The Soul's Interaction with the Divine', is largely about divine punishment of human transgressions, especially punishment in the form of physical disease or insanity. The chapter begins with Polybius and argues that he portrays Philip V and Prusias II as rulers who commit sacrilege in a fit of insanity and are struck by divine vengeance, which brings disaster on their states, ultimately resulting in domination by Rome. Rohmann is certainly right that Polybius stamps such behaviour as insane (whether he means that literally or not), but he does not face the fact that Polybius never unambiguously states that either the insanity or the defeat by Rome was divine punishment. In fact, in the passages quoted (at p. 181 n. 6 and p. 184 n. 27), Polybius says that the

[4] See, e.g., V. Fromentin, 'L'Historie Tragique, a-t-elle existé?', in A. Billault, ed., *Lectures antiques de la tragédie Grecque* (Paris, 2001) 77–92; G. Schepens, 'Polybius' Criticism of Phylarchus', in G. Schepens and J. Bollansée, edd., *The Shadow of Polybius: Intertextuality as a Research Tool in Greek Historiography* (Leuven, 2005) 141–64; J. Marincola, 'Aristotle's Poetics and "Tragic History"', in S. Tsitsiridis, ed., *Parachoregema. Studies on Ancient Theatre in Honour of Professor Gregory M. Sifakis* (Heraklion, 2010) 445–60; and id., 'Polybius, Phylarchus, and "Tragic History": a Reconsideration', in B. Gibson and T. Harrison, edd., *Polybius and his World. Essays in Memory of F. W. Walbank* (Oxford, 2013) 73–90.

wrath of the gods *seemed to* (δοκεῖν) have struck Prusias and his army[5] and that *tyche* 'as if on purpose' (ὥσπερ ἐπίτηδες) had brought forth many disasters all at once.[6] It might well be possible to argue that Polybius means his readers not to take such qualifications of statements seriously, but rather to consider the disasters of Prusias and Philip actual divine vengeance, but Rohmann offers no such argument. The section on Diodorus in this chapter is more convincing. It argues that Diodorus took over Polybius' idea of rulers committing crimes out of insanity, which led their states to ruin and ultimately brought them under Roman control, but that he was more explicit and emphatic about this fate being brought on by means of divine punishment.

The conclusion briefly summarises the findings of the five chapters and then looks ahead to the historiography of Imperial Rome and Late Antiquity where the concepts of insanity of rulers, divine vengeance, the divine sanction of Roman rule, and transmigration of souls can all be found.

Overall, reading this book is a mixed experience. There are some good observations and interesting discussions of, for instance, Polybius' parallels between medicine and historiography, the ancient belief that torture could somehow bring out the truth about a person's soul, and Diodorus' use of metaphorical language of soul and body to describe a commander and his army. Some discussions, such as the ones that aim to demonstrate that Polybius and Diodorus saw a close connection between the soul/moral qualities of a commander/ruler and the soul/moral qualities of his army/state, are well carried out, but reach conclusions that will come as no surprise to scholars of either historiographer. Here, more engagement with existing scholarship would have made the argument more nuanced and interesting.

The most innovative part of the book is the claim that Diodorus was a firm believer in the doctrines of Pythagoras. While the argument to support this is often convincing, it is to a certain extent undermined by Rohmann's own admission that Diodorus' approach to philosophy is eclectic and that Stoicism (and Epicureanism) also play a part in his *Bibliothēkē*. There can be no doubt that Diodorus was fascinated by Pythagoras and his philosophy (the fragments of book 10 are testament to that), but if he was a card-carrying Pythagorean, one would expect him to show this consistently without giving so much space to ideas fundamental to Stoicism and Epicureanism.

[5] ὥστε παρὰ πόδας ἐκ θεοπέμπτου δοκεῖν ἀπηντῆσθαι μῆνιν αὐτῷ διὰ ταύτας τὰς αἰτίας. Pol. 32.15.14.

[6] Τῆς τύχης ὥσπερ ἐπιτήδες ἀναβιβαζούσης ἐπὶ σκηνὴν ἐν ἑνὶ καιρῷ τὰς τούτων συμφοράς. Pol. 23.10.16.

On balance, I would recommend this book to those interested in the connection between philosophy and historiography, but I would caution those not overly familiar with Polybius and Diodorus to read other recent scholarship on these two authors alongside it.

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