

and allegory best represents the processes of the fifth-century audience may well be the more interesting question.

University of Glasgow

IAN RUFFELL
ian.ruffell@glasgow.ac.uk

ORACLES AND NARRATIVES

KINDT (J.) *Revisiting Delphi. Religion and Storytelling in Ancient Greece*. Pp. xvi + 215, ill. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. Cased, £64.99. ISBN: 978-1-107-15157-4.

doi:10.1017/S0009840X18000574

This volume is a brisk, thought-provoking monograph that gives the reader a fresh look at the accounts of Delphic oracles as told in a wide range of authors and genres, from history (Herodotus) to tragedy (Euripides) to philosophy (Plato). With so many scholars having inquired after the realia pertaining to the oracle (e.g. How did the Pythia enter her altered state? How many of the oracular replies we possess were nothing more than later fabrications?), K. proposes the need to study the Delphic oracle from a different angle. Leaving aside other questions for the time being, K. examines these oracle stories as narratives that are told in certain ways and whose common tropes can help us understand something about ancient Greek attitudes, not just towards the oracle, but towards that most central concern of religion, communication between gods and mortals.

K.'s monograph is organised into five main chapters, along with an introduction, a conclusion and a substantive appendix. Each of the five chapters deals with the use of oracles by a different author; after discussing the three Classical authors listed above, she expands the inquiry to later authors, Pausanias and Athenaeus. While the most substantive conclusions come from her three chapters on the Classical trio, the latter two chapters help to frame the entire thesis by introducing a discussion of the role of statues in divine communication and its interplay with the lessons to be drawn from narratives about oracles. Finally, both the conclusion and the appendix (itself comprising another, related reflection) serve as a meditation on the lessons learned during the process of examining the narrative structures of the oracle stories chosen.

The first substantive chapter considers the use of oracles in Herodotus' *Histories*. While K. arranges the authors under discussion in chronological order, starting with Herodotus is nonetheless sensible due to the predominance of oracle stories in his work, from the famous account of Croesus' consultation of the Delphic oracle prior to his invasion of the Persian Empire in Book 1 all the way to the various oracles dating to the Persian invasion of Greece as recorded in the last three books of the *Histories*. K. analyses these accounts in order to determine the ways in which Herodotus uses the oracular pronouncements to further his own narrative, noting that the introduction of an oracle as a second 'omniscient voice' (in addition to the narrator) often allows Herodotus to stake out positions that might not seem sufficiently supported were he simply to state them himself. In this sense, Herodotus uses the pronouncements of the Delphic oracle as a vehicle to adumbrate his own world view. Yet while this might be simply of passing interest in the case of individual oracles, K. notes that there are patterns that recur over the majority of the oracle nar-

ratives told by Herodotus which can be argued to reflect a more systematic philosophy (or we might even say ‘theology’) on the part of the author. Specifically, K. notes the recurring narrative (here I use the term in both the literal and the critical sense) of an ‘enigmatic’ oracle whose correct solution is not obvious but rather must be puzzled out by the individual or polity to whom the oracle was given. Beginning with the tragedy of Croesus, the oracle stories told by Herodotus warn of being too hasty when trying to understand the meaning of an oracle, and they implicitly invite the reader to consider multiple competing interpretations before settling on one. In this sense, Themistocles’ novel interpretation of the ‘wooden wall’ intended to protect the Athenians against the advancing Persian army as referring to the Athenian fleet is something of a paragon, inasmuch as the successful outcome of the story for the Athenians only resulted from a lengthy discussion of the meaning of the oracle, which benefited from input from multiple perspectives.

As K. moves on to an examination of the role of oracles in Euripides’ *Ion*, she notes that the same ‘theology’ recurs in the work of the tragedian. The entire plot of the play hinges on the interpretation of an enigmatic oracle that is originally understood differently by different characters in the play. As the plot evolves, the play calls into question the ease of human–divine communication, painting it as a messy, potentially dangerous affair. Perhaps somewhat subversively, Euripides seems to call into question the goodwill and even the omniscience of the gods in the whole process, suggesting that oracles may be confusing because Apollo himself is confused or even at times malicious. The dramatic tension is resolved only when a representative from Delphi delivers an enigmatic item whose significance must be interpreted by the human characters in the play before it has any meaning. Euripides seems to be suggesting that oracles delivered from Delphi must be carefully considered by recipients before they are of any use, a lesson central also to Herodotus’ oracle narratives.

If Herodotus and Euripides tell a story of their characters getting into trouble due to their improper responses to oracles, Plato tells a diametrically opposed story with his portrayal of Socrates in the *Apology*. In her third chapter, K. explores the ways that Socrates is shown to respond to the oracular pronouncement concerning his own wisdom in a philosophically/religiously ideal fashion. Notably, he does not jump to conclusions about the meaning of the Pythia’s pronouncement that no one is wiser than he. Unlike Herodotus’ Croesus or Euripides’ Xuthus, Plato’s Socrates is wise enough to know that oracles must be treated like enigmas to be solved. As a result, he devotes his life to understanding just what the oracle meant and in what sense it could be correct. Having examined examples of oracle stories from three major genres of Classical Greek literature and noted patterns in the way these stories are told and the attitudes towards oracles they imply, K. correctly suggests that her readings enable us to begin to construct a ‘theology’ of oracles, at least for the Athens of the Classical period.

In her last two chapters and the appendix, K. attempts to build on this insight and broaden the discussion to include both much later authors (Pausanias, Athenaeus and Plutarch) and another topic, namely the role of statues in Greek religion and what can be gleaned from the stories surrounding them. While the chapter on Pausanias deals very little with oracles and seems out of place in a book on oracle stories at first reading, it serves to set up the chapter on Athenaeus, in which K. describes the story of Parmeniscus’ reception of an oracle whose meaning he is only able to decode upon seeing an unexpectedly-shaped statue of Leto at Delos. The moral of the story appears to be similar to the one gleaned from the earlier texts: since the gods and their oracles are enigmas, one must learn to think laterally in order to understand them. Finally, K. examines Plutarch’s treatise on the meaning of the enigmatic epsilon at Delphi, demonstrating that

Plutarch's discussants approach the question as an enigma whose meaning must be carefully considered and whose solution may yet remain unclear, much like an oracle.

K.'s monograph is a beginning, not an end. As she says in her conclusion, 'More research is certainly needed to unveil further dimensions within these narratives and the way in which they relate to other forms of religious storytelling in ancient Greece and elsewhere' (p. 168). Armed with K.'s method of focusing on narrative, it is certain that many more insights wait to be unearthed to add to those cogently adduced by her.

University of New Mexico

LUKE GORTON
lagorton@unm.edu

AN OVERVIEW OF PERSPECTIVES ON THUCYDIDES

BALOT (R.K.), FORSDYKE (S.), FOSTER (E.) (edd.) *The Oxford Handbook of Thucydides*. Pp. xxvi+773, maps. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. Cased, £112.50, US\$150. ISBN: 978-0-19-934038-5.

doi:10.1017/S0009840X18000318

Since antiquity, Thucydides has been recognised as a complex, multilayered and idiosyncratic author; a model for some (though with little consensus about which aspects or qualities are worthy of imitation) and a problematic figure for others. His apparently limited subject matter, war and politics, becomes on closer scrutiny diverse and many-stranded; his apparently straightforward year-by-year narrative of events is revealed as cunningly crafted, permeated with a guiding intelligence and hidden agenda; he offers no explicit lessons, but countless readers have been convinced of the existence of insights and principles ready to be extracted. Over the last century, it has become ever clearer that the protean or indeterminate nature of the text has given rise to contradictory interpretations and often incompatible traditions of understanding. No individual monograph can hope to encompass such variety; a single author can only ever offer a partial, subjective reading that nevertheless claims to capture the true essence of Thucydides (even if, as in G. Hawthorn's 2014 *Thucydides on Politics*, it is a reading that insists on the absence of any unified or unifying theme in the work). There is a strong case that the most useful, if not always the most inspiring, books on Thucydides in recent years have been the multi-author collections that offer a variety of different, even contrasting perspectives: A. Rengakos & A. Tsakmakis's *Brill's Companion* (2006) and, in a very different style, the collection of old and new articles put together by J. Rusten for the *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies* series (2009).

This substantial volume – 770 pages, 40 chapters – does not render those two volumes wholly redundant, but it will certainly become the first choice for anyone wishing to develop their knowledge and understanding of different aspects of Thucydides' work. It offers a superb line-up of contributors, drawn not only from different fields of classical studies and ancient history but also from political theory (one of the other disciplines in which Thucydides plays a significant role), from renowned elder statesmen of the subject