

HERODOTUS

T. HARRISON: *Divinity and History. The Religion of Herodotus*. Pp. xii + 320. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000. Cased, £45. ISBN: 0-19-815291-4.

M. DORATI: *Le Storie di Erodoto: etnografia e racconto*. Pp. 236. Pisa and Rome: Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali, 2000. Paper. ISBN: 88-8147-155-8.

R. BICHLER: *Herodots Welt. Der Aufbau der Historie am Bild der Fremden Länder und Völker, ihrer Zivilisation und ihrer Geschichte*. Pp. 424, maps. Munich: Oldenbourg, Akademie Verlag, 2000. Cased. ISBN: 3-05-003429-7.

It is universally acknowledged that a profusion of elements in Herodotus' work do not comport with modern (or ancient) notions of what is proper historical thinking. A few generations ago, the virtually automatic reaction to his apparent credulity and 'old-fashioned' religiosity was simply to project his world-view back into earlier times as if he were the contemporary of Aeschylus or even the psychical coeval of Solon. By making him the vessel for what was loosely defined as 'archaic thought', the defects of his history could be mitigated by ascribing to him the thought-processes of a pre-rational age. More recently, many modern scholars approach the problem differently. Recognizing that the old assumption of a significant generational gap between him and Thucydides is illusory, they have largely abandoned this pseudo-historical argument; new, essentially ahistorical, interpretations have emerged which are calculated to 'distance' Herodotus from his material without special regard for the era in which he lived and worked. One approach involves a reassessment of Herodotus in the light of currently fashionable views about the primacy of oral performance. It has never been seriously doubted, of course, that Herodotus could well have given readings from his work-in-progress. There are indications in his text that he may have done so, and that possibility is corroborated by the *testimonia*, bad and unreliable as they are. What is new here is the stunning inversion of the traditional hierarchy, which conventionally assigns intellectual primacy to the artist and ascribes a subordinate position to his public. Now we can 'explain' Herodotus by allowing him to be led by the expectations of a (nondescript) audience sufficiently benighted to bear the responsibility for Herodotus' disappointment of our own expectations. (Dorati's book, noticed below, carries this idea to its extreme.) The other way to deal with the 'Herodotus-problem' has been to postulate (explicitly or implicitly) a much more sentient audience rising to the level of sophistication introduced into Herodotus' work by the ingenuity of his interpreters. This Herodotus is the master of pervasive irony and, when properly understood, expresses covert skepticism and disbelief, especially in matters of religion. For the possibility that Herodotus was guided in his work by his possession of real religious belief is for us, *tout court*, unacceptable.

The fact that Herodotus' religious beliefs are formative of the internal logic of his history is one of the most significant conclusions reached by Harrison in his estimable and badly needed book on the subject. H.'s intention is to demonstrate the real impact of Herodotus' religion on the history he wrote (p. 13) by fully exposing 'in all their complexity' his 'more conscious beliefs . . . and what we might term his theological

speculations, side by side with his less conscious beliefs' (p. 15). The introductory chapter incisively reviews the various efforts which have been made to separate Herodotus from these characteristic features of his historiography. He then examines (Chapters II–V) the 'programmatic' element involving the reversals of fortune as defined by Solon, the appearance of the miraculous in the history, the operation of divine retribution, and Herodotus' treatment of oracles and divination. In Chapter VI, H. conflates his results and analyzes Herodotus' conception of divinity itself. Here and in the subsequent chapters, which concern Herodotus' reticence in speaking of some religious matters, his assignment of a universal writ to the gods and, finally, the grand question of 'fate and human responsibility', H. concludes that Herodotus' religious beliefs, incontestably real and assuredly held (see e.g. p. 243), represent not a 'system' but rather (as H. writes with reference to Herodotus' conception of 'fate', p. 228) 'an unrationalized collection of attitudes and responses'.

In general, this study is masterly. The style is very clear considering the murkiness of the subject, and the tone is untendentious in spite of the minefields H. must clear. His method of dealing with his predecessors, of all camps, is a model that deserves to be emulated. So often the operative procedure in recent literature is to develop an argument that at crucial junctures is validated merely by a reference or two to the work of a like-minded predecessor, as if this settled anything. H. is attentive to the whole register of alternative positions, and he represents them faithfully, often by the use of apt quotations. Thus the reader benefits by his possession of the terms of the intellectual debate H. presupposes and continues.

Finally, it must be said that, although H. generally compels assent, some of his conclusions, one of them of great importance, remain debatable. Chiefly, H.'s aversion to the idea that Herodotus saw in the unfolding of history a 'cosmic pattern' of crime and punishment is scarcely justified by his insistence that the properties and functions of fate merely constitute 'a reflex response to a repeated historical pattern' (p. 241). For it is arguable, even probable, that it was Herodotus himself who imposed this pattern on the events he described and, if so, his response was anything but 'reflexive'. Though H. would not agree, it is possible that Herodotus envisaged the operation of such patterns and projected them onto otherwise neutral material even if he was no theologian and failed to order phenomena into an ineluctable system.

In complete contrast to H.'s meticulously argued book stands the self-indulgent monograph of Dorati. Here the work of Herodotus, divided into ethnographical and narrative 'segments' of putatively equal weight (a modification of the older view that Herodotus alternates between the serious and 'nonserious'), is explained purely as Herodotus' response to an entertainment-seeking public. Herodotus, who plays the rôle of a quasi-rhapsode, talks down to his audience. This audience, deaf to inconsistency and thirsting only for 'pleasure', is never defined, except in contrast to a hypothetically learned and specialist readership. D. hesitates to decide whether the audience postulated by him actually was listening to a performance or consisted instead of a readership conceived by Herodotus in qualitatively identical terms. D. simply posits a dichotomy between Herodotus, who purveys pleasure in an *ἀγώνισμα*, and Thucydides, whose *κτῆμα ἐς αἰεί* was produced in conceptual isolation from the everyday world for austere readers seeking what was useful instead of what was pleasurable.

The argumentation throughout the book should offend any discerning reader. His review of the *testimonia* bearing on the question of oral performance (Chapter I) pays only token deference to the fact that the greater part of it consists of inferential speculation inspired by the work itself or instigated by the ancient *dos à dos* of

Herodotus and Thucydides. It is startling to find the legend of the weeping Thucydides taken seriously enough to be discussed at all. The treatment accorded Thuc. 1.22.4 simplifies to the point of caricature Thucydides' complex and obscure pronouncement. D. supposes not only that Herodotus was in Thucydides' sights (an arguable but by no means certain position) but that τὸ μυθῶδες is Thucydides' shorthand for the category of 'ethnography': hence his general avoidance of the subject. In Chapter II, D. deconstructs the orthodox concept of ethnographical 'rubrics' in order to link Herodotus' treatment of this subject with that of Homer, Abaris, and Aeschylus, among others. The ethnographical tradition initiated by Hecataeus is basically ignored; work of this type is swept into a loose category of 'logography', the alleged purpose of which was to provide τὸ μυθῶδες for the delectation of the audience. The picture that emerges of Herodotus, needless to say, is nothing if not demeaning to him. It would appear that Herodotus lacked all sense of any scientific interest in his subjects. To be sure, there are enough problematic passages in Herodotus to make us wonder about his intent and procedure in specific cases. But the serious writer to whom we owe so many instances of detailed research (take, as one minor example, his treatment of the sequence of events leading to the foundation of Cyrene) is unrecognizable in this book. From here D. proceeds to consider the relationship between Herodotus' treatment of foreign peoples in the ethnographical segments and their Hellenization in the narrative portions of the work. His main conclusion is that Herodotus (literally or conceptually) measured out pieces of the work as autonomous segments, undisturbed by inconsistencies that inevitably would be missed by his audience.

Bichler's description of 'the world of Herodotus' is industrious and comprehensive. Though ethnographically centered, the book is organized in such a way as to follow, glacially, a historical line, which proceeds from Herodotus' description of the older cultures whose impact on the Greeks was, in political terms, indirect (the Near East, Egypt), to the Lydians, Medes, and Persians. It culminates in the confrontation between Greeks and Persians in Xerxes' War. The scale of the work is prepossessing inasmuch as B. attempts to cover thoroughly the output of an author who was himself encyclopedic. This plan is not altogether fortunate. The reader is apt to become lost in the details of the individual sections and to lose the sense of the author's drift. It is as if we have two books here posing as one: the detailed exposition of Herodotus' ethnographies, broken into the usual rubrics (the food they prepared and ate, sexual habits, religious beliefs, etc.), and Herodotus' 'ironic' and 'tragic' contemplation of his world from ancient times to his present.

The ethnographical sections of the work will be useful to students of Herodotus chiefly because they are thorough and provide extensive documentation. It does not appear, however, that B. breaks new ground. Far too much of this book consists of laborious paraphrase of Herodotus, who does it much better. When dealing with problematic issues, B. tries, more or less successfully, to steer a middle path between advocates of the 'Liars' school' and their opponents, though his sympathies tend to align with the former. (Pritchett is often censured for extremism; B. tends to seek an Aristotelian mean.) On the other hand, readers will be required to wade through a rather pedantic display of 'significant ideas' presented without argument as self-evident strategies reflexively employed by Herodotus. Thus there is an excessive and counterproductive heaping-up of Herodotus' alleged 'Erzählungsmotiven' (see e.g. p. 141 n. 120), and a proclivity to discover 'tacit criticism' of Greek practices in negative judgements made by Herodotus in the ethnographies that point in no such direction. For example, Herodotus' repudiation of human sacrifice in 2.45.2 becomes

‘an implicit criticism of his own Greek tradition, to which ritual human sacrifice . . . was not alien (*wesensfremd*)’ (p. 166).

B.’s treatment of Xerxes’ War and its prehistory in Section VII 1–3, to which, in good unitarian fashion, the preceding chapters are connected as if they constitute integrally related prolegomena, is basically a rehearsal of Herodotus punctuated with portentous asides. His treatment of the epochal moment, Xerxes’ decision to invade Greece (pp. 318ff.), is disappointingly simplistic and perfunctory. The influence of Aeschylus is overrated; his discussion of the central and much discussed dream sequence (pp. 320–2) veers to all points, and ends, in effect, with a bland dismissal of its significance: ‘Xerxes’ plans for world conquest teach us to see in him no guiltless sacrificial victim of a higher design but rather a haughty but also fickle *Macht-menschen*’ (p. 322). It is deplorable that the book lacks an index of subjects.

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THUCYDIDES ON THE *POLIS*

H. LEPPIN: *Thukydides und die Verfassung der Polis. Ein Vertrag zur politischen Ideengeschichte des 5. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.* (Klio: Beiträge zur Alten Geschichte 1.) Pp. 253. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1999. Cased, DM 112. ISBN: 3-05-003458-0.

Thucydides and the *polis* are two topics that have received a fair amount of scholarly attention in recent years. So a book dealing with his conception of the *polis* comes as no surprise. L.’s interest is not in how Thuc. distinguished a *polis* from, say, a *kômê* or even a *polisma*: that topic has already been treated by the Copenhagen Polis Centre. Rather, his work is a study in intellectual history, focusing on Thuc.’s ideas about constitutional forms and about the social structures of the *polis*. Justification for the work can be found in the bewilderingly broad range of notions that have been held about Thuc.’s preferred form of constitution: Hobbes famously thought that Thuc. was a defender of monarchy, but others have regarded him as an oligarch, or a democrat, or as someone who eludes such rigid definitions—a thinker who valued good political behaviour but did not see such behaviour as the preserve of any one type of constitution (see L.’s review of past scholarship at pp. 11–14).

What Jacqueline de Romilly did in *Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism* (Oxford, 1963; French original 1947) for Thuc.’s treatment of external affairs, L. does for his treatment of internal affairs—but with a more cautious methodology. Like de Romilly, he traces connections between Thuc. and his contemporaries, and resists the temptation to speculate too much about influences. Where he is more cautious is in his use of Thuc.’s speeches. He rigidly observes the separation of speech and narrative, while making good use of the speeches as evidence for contemporary strands of thought. He also insists that Thuc. is not a political theorist, and accepts that a complete picture of Thuc.’s notions about the *polis* cannot be expected from his history.

What topics does L. cover? He first sketches the development of ideas about constitutional forms (e.g. the use of the word *dēmokratia*) in tragedy, Herodotus (with a rather superficial treatment of the function of the Constitutional Debate in the narrative as a whole), Protagoras, Democritus, and the *Anonymus Iamblichi* (a threesome classified as ‘Demokratienähe Denker’). Analysis of Thuc.’s speech and narrative then shows how it is the opposition between democracy and oligarchy, not