

GREECE AND CHINA

KIM (H.J.) *Ethnicity and Foreigners in Ancient Greece and China*. Pp. vi + 217. London: Duckworth, 2009. Cased, £50, US\$80. ISBN: 978-0-7156-3807-1.

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As K. observes in his introduction (Chapter 1), ‘the comparative study of otherness and the portrayal of foreigners in [the] ancient civilizations [of Greece and China] ... ha[d] never been seriously attempted’ (p. 4) before his Oxford D.Phil. thesis of 2007, on which this book is based. He does not, however, note the main reason: few scholars have the language skills to engage with primary sources on both sides of the comparison without relying on the potentially distorting or obscuring lens of translations or secondary literature. K. himself reads Greek but little or no Chinese, and uses English and Korean translations of ancient Chinese texts, as well as modern studies of these texts in English, French and Korean.¹

Chapters 2 and 3 seek to provide a context to the ethnographies of Herodotus’ *Histories* and Sima Qian’s *Shiji* (c. 90 B.C.) by tracing the evolution of perceptions and representations of ‘barbarians’ in Archaic and Classical Greece and in north China during the Spring-and-Autumn (770–c. 476) and Warring States (c. 475–221 B.C.) periods. On the Greek side, K. argues that both a Panhellenic identity (or ‘Greek ethnicity’, p. 19) and the idea of a ‘Greek-barbarian antithesis’ (p. 22) were inventions of the Ionians under Persian rule in the late sixth century B.C., and spread to the rest of Greece during the Ionian Revolt. This modifies E. Hall’s argument in *Inventing the Barbarian* (1989) that these concepts were products of the Persian Wars and subsequent Athenian propaganda within the Delian League. Sadly, K.’s novel interpretation is weakened by the fragmentary nature of the late Archaic evidence from Ionia and the consequent limits on our knowledge about its authors. It is impossible to ascertain the semantic context for the use of *barbaros* in two cryptic fragments from Anacreon (fr. 423) and Heraclitus (fr. 107), or to confirm that they, Anaximander and Hecataeus were all reacting to ‘the danger of absorption into a universal empire ruled by an alien, non-Eastern Mediterranean ethnic group’ by inventing ‘a distinct and superior Greek *ethnos*’ (p. 29) in opposition to the Persians and all other ‘barbarians’. Hecataeus’ extant geographical writings certainly do not fit the argument, as K. himself acknowledges in passing (p. 12); note also his initial opposition to the Ionian Revolt at Herodotus 5.36.

K. interprets Classical Greek denigration of the Persians as reflecting an ‘inferiority complex’ / ‘sense of inferiority’ (pp. 45, 55, 58), ‘envy’ (p. 46), ‘anxiety to find a niche for themselves’ (p. 49), ‘preoccupation with discovering their own identity’ (p. 55), ‘weakness and insecurity’, ‘xenophobia’, ‘unease’ and ‘lack of confidence’ (p. 58). This is quite plausible (one is reminded of many modern nationalist discourses), but his lengthy debunking of ancient and modern notions about the uniqueness or superiority of Greek learning, political institutions and martial prowess *vis-à-vis* the Near East ultimately brings him no closer to proving his argument that the fourth-century Athenian elite lived in anxious, envious fear of the Persian Empire. Xenophon, especially, defies categorisation as a xenophobe; K. adds a note (p. 161 n. 92) that ‘his view regarding non-Greeks is rather ambivalent’ – surely an understatement – and points readers to Steven Hirsch’s

¹This reviewer, whose research is mostly on ancient Chinese concepts of ethnic and cultural identity, reads Chinese but not Greek.

The Friendship of the Barbarians: Xenophon and the Persian Empire (1985), but one would have liked to see some actual engagement with Hirsch's arguments and also with the more conceptually sophisticated readings of fourth-century sources in J. Hall's *Hellenicity: between Ethnicity and Culture* (2002).

K. claims that in the Chinese Spring-and-Autumn period 'no radical Hua Xia-barbarian divide existed' (p. 37):² the Zhou states treated the militarily powerful Rong and Di peoples as 'political and social equals' (p. 36), and alliances and cultural interactions across ethnic boundaries were common. This supposedly changed in the last century of the Warring States period, by which time the Rong and Di had all been conquered by the Zhou states and could be retrospectively regarded with contempt. A discourse of 'barbarian' moral, cultural and political inferiority then developed and became the basis for 'a definite antithesis between the Hua Xia and the barbarian' (p. 64). There are many methodological and interpretative problems with the arguments presented in support of the above thesis, but space allows for comment on only the most significant of these.

First, K.'s analysis relies heavily on the *Zuozhuan*, by far the most detailed historical source for the Spring-and-Autumn period. However, use of this text is fraught with difficulties because of its relatively late composition (probably fourth century B.C.) and the likelihood of some even later interpolations. Numerous conversations and speeches recorded in the *Zuozhuan* feature seemingly harsh rhetoric about 'barbarian' bestiality, untrustworthiness or general otherness, forcing K. into the tactic of interpreting them all as 'the invention of a writer from the Warring States period' and therefore reflecting 'Warring States attitudes' (p. 63) rather than the Spring-and-Autumn. This leaves him hardly any evidence for real Spring-and-Autumn views on 'barbarians', and he resorts to using the *Chunqiu* (early fifth century B.C.?) and the *Analects* (fifth to fourth century B.C.?) as bases for comparison with the *Zuozhuan* (p. 64). The former is so short on detail as to be useless for this purpose, while the latter contains only one unambiguous comment on the 'barbarians': 'Barbarians with rulers are not equal to Xia states without' (*Analects* 3.5). Unfortunately, K. misses this ethnocentric message by relying on Arthur Waley's translation of the *Analects*, which reads the line as a milder lament about the Zhou states having sunk, on account of political anarchy, to a level beneath that of 'barbarians'. In fact, this interpretation of *Analects* 3.5 was first made no earlier than the eleventh century A.D. and is therefore of dubious reliability.

Second, K. notes that in Warring States writings on the subject (more precisely, those belonging to the 'Confucian' or *Ru* tradition), 'barbarians can become Hua Xia through proper education and enlightenment' (p. 71), especially that provided by the rule of a sage-king, a moral paragon bringing peace and order to the world. K. traces this ideal of acculturating and assimilating (or 'transforming') the 'barbarians' to an 'imperial vision that developed among the territorial Warring States in the third century BC', but does not elaborate on the origins of this vision or explain what made it compatible with a concurrently developing idea of the 'barbarian' as the antithetical other.

²K. opts for referring to the dominant ethnic group of the Zhou dynasty (c. 1045–256 B.C.) and its various feudal states as 'Hua Xia' rather than 'Chinese', the reason being that 'Chinese' is now used in China as a multi-ethnic category of nationality, a convention that K. considers ahistorical. However, 'Hua Xia' as a supposedly ancient ethnonym is itself a construct of twentieth-century Chinese historiography. 'Xia' is used in several Spring-and-Autumn and Warring States sources, and both 'Hua' and 'Xia' in one (the *Zuozhuan*), but the two are almost never seen in combination; in the sole exception it is used as a toponym and not an ethnonym.

The reader should note that Israeli Sinologist Yuri Pines' persuasive study of these same sources, 'Beasts or Humans: Pre-imperial Origins of the "Sino-Barbarian" Dichotomy',³ presents an interpretation fundamentally different from K.'s. Where K. sees both the discourse of 'barbarian' inferiority and the belief in 'barbarian' transformability as intellectual products of the late Warring States, Pines sees the two as consistent and mutually complementary throughout the Spring-and-Autumn and Warring States periods.

Chapter 4 begins comparing Herodotus and Sima Qian. It finds Herodotus much less ethnocentric than his peers and tending towards cultural relativism; Sima Qian, in contrast, 'conforms to the general trend of ethnocentrism evident in Chinese literary discourse' (p. 93) and 'demotes the barbarians to the lowest tier of the Confucian moral and social hierarchy' (p. 98). K.'s view of Herodotus as the *philobarbaros* raises no eyebrows, but his analysis of Sima Qian suffers from several misinterpretations. For example, he mentions a well-known *Shiji* story about the Spring-and-Autumn period, in which the defector You Yu praises the simplicity and unity of the Rong 'barbarians' he serves as superior to the corrupting and conflict-ridden civilization of the Zhou states. The story is conceptually much more complex than K.'s summary conveys, and his statement that You Yu 'answers that he does not know' (p. 98) why the Rong are better governed reflects a basic misinterpretation of the original Chinese. You Yu actually says that among the Rong, 'the governing of a state is like the orderly functioning of a human body, in that *it does not know* what is giving it order; this is the true order brought about by a sage' (misinterpreted phrase in italics). This is an expression of Daoist political philosophy, and cannot be read as Sima Qian 'professing ignorance of the ways of the barbarian' (p. 98) out of a sense of 'Confucian' ethnocentrism.

Chapter 5 compares Herodotus' representation of the Scythians with Sima Qian's representation of the Xiongnu. Both historians supposedly regarded nomads with 'fascinated revulsion' (p. 123) and emphasised their cultural otherness, although Sima Qian is surprisingly found to be less ethnocentric and more of a cultural relativist with regard to the Xiongnu, the key evidence for this being his account of the eunuch Zhonghang Yue's (or 'Zhonghang Shuo', a variant reading that K. follows) spirited defence of the customs of the Xiongnu, to whom he has defected, against Han ambassadors who criticise them as barbaric and immoral. Indeed, Sima Qian lets Zhonghang Yue echo You Yu by claiming that among the Xiongnu, 'the governing of a state is like a human body'; K. of course misses this clue, and struggles to reconcile the Zhonghang Yue passage with his earlier portrayal of Sima Qian and his intellectual milieu, finally contradicting himself by arguing that because the Han Empire was pluralistic and multi-ethnic, Sima Qian naturally reflects this as well. Even more curiously, K. extends the argument to Herodotus and claims that his early life under Persian rule 'gave him ample exposure to the universalism and pluralism of the host empire' (p. 123) and therefore made him less ethnocentric; K. does not explain why such exposure would have the opposite effect on the Ionians. For a much stronger Scythians–Xiongnu comparison, readers should turn to Siep Stuurman's 'Herodotus and Sima Qian: History and the Anthropological Turn in Ancient Greece and Han China', *Journal of World History* 19.1 (2008), which comes to very different conclusions.

³In R. Amitai and M. Biran (edd.), *Mongols, Turks, and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World* (Leiden, 2005).

Chapter 6 compares Herodotus on the Lydians with Sima Qian on the Korean kingdom of Joseon and the south Chinese kingdom of Southern Yue. The Greeks, K. argues, stereotyped Lydians as effeminate luxury-lovers to obscure the fact that their cultures were nearly identical; however, Herodotus is of limited relevance here, since the *Histories* have little to say about Lydian culture. Likewise, Sima Qian provides no ethnographic descriptions of Joseon and Southern Yue, only political history. Despite (or perhaps, because of) this, K. concludes that Sima Qian perceived Joseon and Southern Yue as ‘part of the civilized Hua Xia world’ (p. 141) because of their sophisticated political institutions. He therefore interpreted their effective independence from Han rule as treason and rebellion and approved of their invasion and annexation by the Han in 111–108 B.C. This surely underestimates Sima Qian’s objectivity. The most sympathetic depiction in the chapter on Southern Yue is clearly that of the aged Yue chancellor Lü Jia, whose efforts to prevent the kingdom’s absorption by the Han finally force him to commit regicide and lead a war of resistance. As for Joseon, Sima Qian tells us that a rogue Han envoy created a *casus belli* by murdering a Joseon nobleman who was escorting him back to Han territory, then claiming he had been attacked. Nowhere does this account justify the subsequent Han invasion as a quelling of rebels.

K.’s stated aim in writing this book, to ‘provide the foundations for future [comparative] research’ (p. 3) by classicists, is laudable. Unfortunately, the book does not make a sufficiently accurate comparison of ethnic identity and alterity in ancient Greece and China, and non-Sinologists relying exclusively on it for information on the Chinese sources (especially Sima Qian) are likely to be misled. One hopes that an improved version, incorporating input from Sinologists and a more careful engagement with the Chinese sources, will eventually be available. Until then, classicists interested in the comparative potential of the Chinese material are encouraged to start with Mu-chou Poo’s well-researched *Enemies of Civilization: Attitudes toward Foreigners in Ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, and China* (2005), even though it does not deal with the *Shiji*.

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THE GORGON

WILK (S.R.) *Medusa. Solving the Mystery of the Gorgon*. Pp. x + 277, figs, ills. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. Paper, £13 (Cased, £25). ISBN: 978-0-19-534131-7 (978-0-19-512431-6 hbk).
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W.’s compendious and engaging speculative investigation of the origin and meaning of the gorgon, now re-issued in paperback, draws on ideas and disciplines that are not normally associated with mythology: astronomy, optics and forensic pathology. The volume is divided into two parts: the first, ‘The Mystery’, opens with a general discussion of the nature of myth, moves on to the story of Perseus and Medusa and its depiction in Greco-Roman and Etruscan art, and concludes by discussing gorgon-like figures from diverse cultures that share the key characteristics of Medusa.

In the second section, ‘The Solution’, W. offers three different but not exclusive hypotheses for the origins of the construction of the figure of the gorgon. First he