

BOOK REVIEW

Greek Historiography. By THOMAS F. SCANLON. Malden, MA; Oxford and Chichester, West Sussex, U.K.: Wiley Blackwell, 2015 (series: Blackwell Introductions to the Classical World). Pp. xii + 340. Hardcover, \$69.95. ISBN 978-1-4051-4522-0.

The number of books on Greek historiography is significant. After the two volumes edited by John Marincola (*A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), one could wonder whether it would be sensible to add another volume to this number—even though this book is evidently directed at a different audience. The volume under scrutiny is aimed at “students and ... interested general readers with little specialist background, and yet to offer, both to that audience and to more advanced students and scholars, some useful observations on the field” (vi).¹ As such, it follows traditional lines: the subsequent treatment, in as many chapters, of ‘local storytellers’, Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, fourth century BC authors, Hellenistic historians, Polybius (though obviously also a writer living in the Hellenistic period), and Greek historians in the Roman era. It is a logical and well-balanced series, but not one that as such justifies a need for a new book.

Scanlon’s book indeed does differ from most ‘ordinary’ *Greek Historiographies* and does offer useful additional perspectives on the subject, though admittedly much less so for the “more advanced students and scholars” this book is stated to be intended for as well: I found no really new—to me—perspectives in Scanlon’s book. Nevertheless, the chapter devoted to historians who wrote in Greek during the Roman period is a very useful one, as it is an often neglected subject.

Scanlon’s choice of authors is to a large extent determined by the fact whether their “texts are extensively preserved [either in print or online], are available in good translations, and enjoy modern discussions in English” (vi) (even though important but fragmentarily preserved authors, like, for example, Duris of

¹ Though I am not familiar with other volumes in this series of ‘Introductions to the Classical World’ and the publisher’s policy on the matter, the intended audience is perhaps best served by a book without footnotes (or, for that matter, endnotes), just like the book under scrutiny. References are present in the Harvard referencing system.

Samos, are discussed as well). These are sensible criteria, especially in view of Scanlon's determined audience, even though in the discussion these very criteria exclude some relevant literature, like Dominique Lenfant (ed.) (2011), *Les Perses vus par les Grecs: Lire les sources classiques sur l'empire achéménide*, Paris: Armand Collin (e.g. relevant for the discussions on, *inter alios*, Herodotus, Xenophon, and Diodorus) or even the elementary references in the, therefore, still relevant Pauly-Wissowa's *Realencyclopädie classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, Stuttgart: Metzler, 1894-1974.² It may be an elitist view I hold, but I firmly believe that anyone who is really interested in classical (here obviously Greek) literature should at least *try* (my emphasis) to, passively, master German, French, or even Italian because much on this subject has been—and still is being—written in those languages.

In the discussion of the various authors he pays attention to—and I really think Scanlon made an excellent and representative selection—Scanlon approaches various issues that are more or less constants and/or extremely relevant in Greek historiography, like the relation between human nature and exercising power, whether or not external influences (divine powers, for example) play any role in human activity, the portrayal of “self” and “others” (I here missed, for example, E.S. Gruen (2011), *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press or E. Hall, (1991), *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-definition Through Tragedy*, Oxford: Clarendon next to P. Cartledge (2002²), *The Greeks: A Portrait of Self and Others*, Oxford: OUP, of which Scanlon does mention the first edition of 1993), to name but a few of them. Excellent, too, is Scanlon's treatment of Herodotus, Thucydides, and—somewhat more difficult—Xenophon, as well as many of the other authors whose work is paid attention to, discussing the contents of their work—as much as is possible—even though this book is evidently directed at a different audience book by book. Also the positioning of the various authors in their times is an asset for notably undergraduates and interested general readers, making the book extremely worthwhile as an introduction to the study of Greek historiography.

A special reference should be made to the concluding chapter, ‘Concluding Observations on Greek Historical Writing’ (276–290). It is clear, lucid, and very worthwhile. In brief notes, Scanlon discusses the evolution in Greek historical

² Surprising might be the fact that two of the ‘spin-offs’ of the *Realencyclopädie*, sc. *Der Kleine Pauly* and *Der Neue Pauly* are referred to in the ‘Abbreviations’—and the references in the text—, *Der Neuer Pauly* next to its translated version published by Brill's and by Scanlon referred to as *New Pauly*.

writing as a genre, paying attention to the treatment of its formal aspects, of power, metaforces (like the divine aspect, but also concepts like honor or virtue), historical philosophies, and continuities, of human nature, of supernatural forces (gods, fate), of causation, of leadership, of civilization and the “barbarians”, and of the legacy of Greek historiography. Necessarily some of the discussions overlap, as historiography obviously not only is a dynamic process but also touches upon many adjoining aspects of human activity. However, I found the overlaps nowhere disturbing, let alone out of order. Moreover, I endorse most of Scanlon's remark that “[t]here is a remarkable continuity in the fundamental form and subject matter of Greek historical writing. Even into the early Christian era of the fourth century and following, there was a consistent reverence for (and reference to) classical predecessors in the genre, who offered a palate of options to serve the very different historical circumstances.³ The fixity of the genre—indeed into the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and the age of reason up to the present—is, for better or worse, a major legacy of the Greek historians” (290). Only as regards the reverence of several authors for predecessors I harbor some serious doubts: for example the remarks by Ctesias as regards Herodotus, Lucian as regards both Ctesias and Herodotus, Polybius in his book 12 as regards Timaeus, let alone Plutarch as regards Herodotus—to name some examples—can hardly be re-regarded as ‘reverent’. The rest of Scanlon's observation quoted here, though, I largely share. As it is, the book itself is the best argument to support Scanlon's thesis.

As I explained at the beginning, I started to review Scanlon's book with considerable skepticism and still believe that much relevant (non-English) literature on the Greek authors discussed in this book is regrettably left out of—direct—consideration (even though Scanlon obviously is aware of it). After reading it, I must, however, fully admit that the book does have a useful function in the number of books one way or another devoted to Greek historiography and that it certainly merits to be considered as a textbook for notably undergraduate students of the subject. To its value adds the fact that it is well written, well produced (with only few typos), that it provides—apart from the bibliographies conclud-

³ In this respect, Alan Cameron's *The Last Pagans of Rome*, Oxford: OUP, 2013, notably its chapters 11–18 (399–690), might well be an eye-opener for Scanlon's intended audience and looks to me one of the useful sequels to Scanlon's book, just like L.R. Reynolds/N.G. Wilson (2013⁴), *Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature*, Oxford: OUP.

ing every chapter—a concise guide for further reading (with publications in English, apart from one in Italian and some important works [partly] in German referred to in the abbreviations), an elaborate “index locorum”, and an efficient and comprehensive general index. In providing these assets, the book, even though it is not really affordable, offers an excellent value for its price.

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