

BOOK REVIEW

Moral History from Herodotus to Diodorus Siculus By LISA IRENE HAU. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2016. Pp. vii + 312. Hardcover, £80.00. ISBN 978-1-4744-1107-3.

Certainly in ancient (Greek)—but also later—literature, and historiography in particular, there was a commonplace idea that it had, or should have, an edifying function, a didactic usefulness, not merely practical and political, but above all moral. After the publication of Leopold von Ranke's works in the nineteenth century, with its emphasis on so-called historical objectivity, the tide turned and morality (or moralizing) became, as Hau phrases it, "... a dirty word used only of historians whose works have been perceived to be substandard ..." (4). However, she believes it is time for another change in approach by the modern historians: "If we are going to understand ancient historiography, as a literary genre and as a collection of invaluable historical sources, we need to begin to take its claims to moral-didactic value seriously" (5).

To illustrate her point, Hau has made a reasoned selection of a number of works by historiographers from the Classical and the Hellenistic period (6–7). In this context, the word historiographer (instead of historian) is chosen, *inter alia*, "to emphasise that this is a study of the literary representations of the results of that [historical] research" (7). At the same time, I miss in her book a clear and comprehensive definition of what precisely Hau considers as "morality" (even though, to some extent, it shows implicitly in the various discussions on the historiographers treated): in this respect the book by Kenneth Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle*, 2nd edition (Indianapolis/Cambridge 1994) might have been useful. Regrettably, this relevant book is neither referred to here nor does it feature in the bibliography.

Hau points out that moral didacticism and historical explanation are not mutually exclusive in the works of the ancient historiographers. Above all, it is "not an add-on to ancient historiography invented by rhetorically degenerate Hellenistic authors, but an integral feature of the genre from its very inception" (18). Moral didacticism is rather "a strategy employed by an author to teach the reader something about the ethical implications of various human actions and behaviours" (7).

Moreover, in the classical world there was no hard divide between politics and ethics: the two were, on the contrary, as closely related as two sides of the same coin. Moralizing in the works of the classical authors can take different shapes and forms: prescriptive and descriptive, explicit and implicit (or perhaps rather: overt and subtle), in pauses in the narrative (digressions) and in the course of the narrative of the events (guiding). Different combinations are feasible, and in fact occur, but the last two are considered to be the most useful as an aim for Hau's investigation. While at work, the aim of the ancient historiographer, according to Hau, was to make clear to the audience "that those who behave morally tend to be rewarded" (14), either instantly, or indirectly, or even posthumously. Much as the reviewer shares Hau's general line of thought, the lack of a proper definition—or at least more than some general content—of what exactly Hau herself believes to be the overriding "morality" becomes here even more troublesome.

That very lack of clarity, due to the absence of a well-defined (and comprehensive) concept of the book-title's pivotal word, also becomes visible in the treatment of the various authors Hau discusses: Polybius (23–72, Chapter one); Diodorus of Sicily (73–123, Chapter two); the fragmentarily preserved Hellenistic authors (124–168, Chapter three); Herodotus (172–193, Chapter four); Thucydides (194–215, Chapter five); Xenophon's *Hellenica* (216–244, Chapter six); and fragmentary Classical historiographers (245–269, Chapter seven). Hau makes unmistakably clear that we can recognize an attempt to provide some "edifying" service to their respective audiences in the work of all these authors. How and where this service fits in her concept of morality remains, however, to some extent (not wholly!) up to the reader to determine.

Regrettably, moreover, Hau tends to overlook in her discussion a good deal of both recent and less recent modern literature written in languages other than English (as well as some works in English, as indicated earlier). Depending on the intended audience this may be a thoroughly plausible -and even logical- approach. If, however, an academic public is to be approached, I find it an omission. Simultaneously, I believe Hau fails to make sufficiently clear to *her* audience that the ancient historiographers' audiences—and indeed the societies in which the historiographers operated—differed dramatically. Even the relatively small-scale Greek world had changed considerably in the fairly short period separating Herodotus and Thucydides, not to mention the differences existing between the, comparatively more confined, world of the Greek *poleis* and the 'global' Hellenistic world of Diodorus.

In the discussion of each and every one of the historiographers, Hau makes it absolutely clear that it is rewarding to look at them with fresh eyes or from a different angle on a regular basis. In addition to that, Hau provides many incentives for further study and clearly shows that historiography is a dynamic field in classical studies. Moreover, she largely succeeds in reaching her major goal, to show that (quoting the publisher's blurb): "[f]or the ancient Greek historiographers, moral didacticism was a way of making sense of the past and making it relevant to the present; but this does not mean that they falsified events: truth and morality were compatible and synergistic ends." If only for that reason, Hau's work is very commendable and more than worth your while, deserving to be on the desk of everyone interested in the field of ancient historiography—even in spite of all criticism expressed in this review (good books deserve a constructively intended critical approach; bad books do not deserve that attention). The book ends with a brief conclusion (272–277); a bibliography (278–298), in which Anglophonic works prevail and works in, e.g. German, French, Italian, and Spanish, even though present, are hugely underrepresented; an index of citations (299–306); and a general index (307–312). As usual with the EUP, the book is well taken care of and contains very few typos (remarkably some more in the Greek (accentuation!) than in the English)..

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