BOOK REVIEW

Space and Time in Ancient Greek Narrative. By Alex C. PURVES. New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. xi + 273. $89.00/£53.00. ISBN 978-0-521-19098-5.

One of the most memorable phrases used by Herodotus is ὁδὸς λόγων, "the path of words," describing the thread his storytelling follows. The metaphor that connects travel through space and movement through a narrative is a very pregnant one, especially within the work of Herodotus. If one further connects this verbal ὁδὸς with περίοδος, connoting "map," "sentence," and "journey," and takes account of Herodotus' intense interest in both maps and journeys as described in sentences, one enters the rich complex of ideas and connections spun by Alex Purves in this fascinating book.

A title as far-ranging as *Space and Time in Ancient Greek Narrative* could make even the most generous reader skeptical, but Purves succeeds in her task to a remarkable degree. That task is hard to summarize, but Purves' own words in her preface define it thus: "to give an account of the way that we might understand the concept of literature having a 'form' that is viewable in the mind's eye, especially in relation to the various practical and spatial metaphors that give it shape." The primary metaphors Purves considers are two contrasting περίοδοι, the map and the journey, the former revealing itself synoptically and timelessly, as if from a great height, the latter unfolding through time as experienced by a ground-level traveler.

Herodotus and his Ionian predecessors, writers intensely interested in περίοδοι of both kinds, would seem the most fertile territory for Purves' approach, but she does not begin there. Her first two chapters instead deal with the two Homeric epics, contrasted (to reduce a very complex discussion to its simplest terms) as a synoptic, map-like narrative in the case of the *Iliad* and a diachronic, path-like narrative in that of the *Odyssey*. The description of Achilles' shield in *Iliad* 18 looms large for Purves as an emblem of how that poem is spatially configured: Homer offers us a "god's-eye view," at times in the literal sense. Our perspective in the *Iliad* is the lofty perch of the Muse, who knows and sees

all; by contrast, the *Odyssey*, with its central journey narrative recounted by mortal Odysseus, brings us down to sea level. Governing this whole discussion is a set of passages quoted from Aristotle, in which "surveyability," the quality defined by the Greek word εὐσύνοπτον, is an important virtue of both of poetic plots and geographic units like city-states.

The two central chapters of *Space and Time* deal with early Greek cartography and with Herodotus, and rich insights into both can be found there. The discussion of Aristagoras' map in *Histories* 5, for example, contrasts the allure the map at first holds for Cleomenes—the Spartan king to whom it is presented—with the dismay that follows, after Aristagoras is forced to unfold the map through time (by explaining how long it would take for the Spartans to cross its expanse). But Purves does not only bring cartographic passages (fascinating though these are) into her discussion. Many other episodes, like those of Alcmaeon in Croesus' treasure house and Gyges with Candaules' wife, are analyzed by way of a similar contrast between the timeless "still life" and narrative that unfolds through time, or, to put it slightly differently, within history.

Not all of the connections Purves makes, as she loops episodes and ideas together in grand skeins, are, to my mind, convincing. Take for example the following, bringing together two disparate moments of Herodotus' *Histories*: "The closing of Cleomenes' door on the view of the map gives a certain symmetry to the *Histories*, by reversing Candaules' fateful act of opening the door to his private room and hiding Gyges behind it" (140). At moments like these, Purves seems to have gotten carried away with her own deftness, creating juxtapositions that work within her construct but are not organic to the texts she is explicating. I hasten to add, however, that such moments are far outweighed by others in which Purves has firmly supported her connections with hard-nosed philology—almost all quoted passages are provided in both Greek and English, with close attention given to the Greek—or has explained her thinking so eloquently that the reader comes away at least partly convinced.

The book's final two chapters deal with two works of Xenophon, the *Anabasis* and —surprise! —the *Oeconomicus*. This last work, which Purves regards as a kind of counterpoint to the *Anabasis*, allows her to take the discussion into interior space, the architectural layout of an idealized Greek house. It's a clever move, but I was disappointed that Purves did not continue along her earlier trajectory by taking on, say, the *Argonautica*, or a work of Hellenistic geography. She admits in her introduction that her choice of topics is eclectic, not comprehensive; but given that kind of freedom, this particular choice seems an arbitrary one.

Despite its peculiar endpoint, this book largely succeeds in its highly ambitious goals. It's beautifully written and will open up new avenues of exploration for many kinds of readers: those interested in historiography, cartography, Homeric epic, or narrative generally. Careful research is evident in the footnotes (which, while carrying full sets of citations, are admirably brief) and in the up-to-date bibliography.

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