

BOOK REVIEW

*Time and Narrative in Ancient Historiography: The "Plupast" from Herodotus to Ap-
pian*. Edited by Jonas Grethlein and Christopher B. Krebs. Cambridge and New
York: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp. ix + 257. Hardcover, \$99.00. ISBN
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The collection of ten essays, stemming from a 2006 conference, under review investigates those instances in historical narrative where reference is made, either by characters within the narrative or by the narrator, to events that happened before the events of the narrative proper, i.e. events of the "plupast." As the editors explain in a clear and helpful introduction (1–11), these prior events can be evoked any number of ways: e.g. characters' speeches, inter- or intratextual references, mention of material objects. Often times, though, these references to the more distant past, especially when made by or focalized through internal characters, can function as a *mise-en-abyme* and, by mirroring the work of the historian or text, they offer implicit, or "metahistorical," commentary on the role of the historian and/or his text.

Students of ancient historiography and of ancient narrative in general may say this all sounds suspiciously familiar and that this phenomenon of the "plupast" could also be described as (internal or external) *analepseis*, exemplarity, allusion or inter-/intratextuality among others. The editors, though, take pains to argue (esp. 4–5) that, while the concept of the "plupast" is indebted to narratology, the "plupast" is more comprehensive than the aforementioned categories since it may be evoked not just by references to specific texts and events but by broader references to, e.g. *topoi*, material objects or a general knowledge of past events (it should be noted that Cynthia Damon's 2009 *PLLS* article appeared too late to be of use for this collection). The very breadth of the category "plupast" is at once both its greatest strength and weakness. On the one hand, it provides a handy, succinct way to refer to an important phenomenon in ancient historiography. On the other hand, because it can be evoked in so many different ways it is often too broad and therefore still in need of further clarification or specification.

While the novelty and necessity of the term “plupast” may be debatable, the value of the approach is not and the essays, by and large, yield interesting results and insights concerning authors and passages that have been intensively studied for some time, e.g. Thucydides and Livy, as well as for those that have only been attracting attention more recently, e.g. Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Appian. On a side note, the criteria used to select the included authors are neither explicitly stated nor implicitly clear. To begin a book on ancient (i.e. “Greco-Roman”) historiography with Herodotus is understandable, to end it with Appian less so. Similarly, the phrase “from Herodotus to Appian” is misleading since there are no essays on authors such as Polybius or Josephus. Further, if Plutarch is included, why exclude Nepos? Explanations for these choices will be sought in vain. On the bright side, anyone working on authors excluded from this study still have plenty of room to work.

It is most likely that readers will consult this book not in its entirety but according to their individual interests. Those readers will most likely find much to their liking. As previously stated, the results are by and large interesting and the discussions fruitful. While the limits of space preclude individual treatment of each essay, let me add to the general comments already given with specific reference to a few contributions.

As the editors point out, a historian’s evocation of the “plupast” can invite comparison to that historian’s own methodology and/or narrative. What this comparison, or this metahistorical commentary, will reveal, however, varies from author to author. C. Schultze (“Negotiating the Plupast: Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Roman Self-definition”), for example, analyzes the use of “plupast” in (all of) Dionysius of Halicarnassus. Whether the narrator or a character within the narrative evokes the “plupast,” external readers will see attempts to more accurately understand the past through critical and discerning investigation and deliberation. The internal actors can then apply the lessons learned from the past to their own present situation. This is what the historian hopes to provide for his external readers as well. On the other hand, L. Pitcher (“War Stories: the Uses of the Plupast in Appian”) reveals that internal narrators often use the past irresponsibly and “subordinate the true lessons of the past to the expediency of the present” (209). Even though those internal narrators’ method of narration is often similar to Appian’s, their engagement with the “plupast” is not meant to be a direct reflection of the historian’s. Rather, Appian uses these instances to contrast his work and method with internal characters’ inferior attempts.

These examples help demonstrate the most important contributions of this collection. First of all, it becomes apparent that the phenomenon of historians' evocation of the "plupast" is ubiquitous—possibly even after Appian. Secondly, though, this evocation is by no means uniform, though the majority of essays here do focus on internal characters' speeches. Finally, while most, if not all, of these evocations of the "plupast" invite comparison with the historian and his work, the commentary to be found in those comparisons is in no way the same from one author to the next. This collection, then, will be of specific value to those interested in better understanding any of the authors included but also to those interested in applying the methodology to those authors who were not.

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