

BOOK REVIEW

New Worlds from Old Texts: Revisiting Ancient Space and Place. Edited by BARKER, ELTON, STEFAN BOUZAROVSKI, CHRISTOPHER PELLING, AND LEIF ISAKSEN. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2016. Pp. xviii + 398. Hardcover, \$135.00. ISBN 978-0-19-966413-9.

Historians, literary scholars, and archaeologists have long used maps to visualize the movement and distribution of people and artifacts across the ancient Mediterranean World, and classicists have been early adopters of digital tools such to assist in those visualizations. Nevertheless, if our aim is to understand how the ancient Greeks conceived of and experienced space and place, that is, to appreciate the cultural geography of the ancient world, modern Cartesian mapping concepts and some digital tools, such as GIS (Geographic Information Systems), are inadequate, especially when dealing with data from literary sources (21). *New Worlds from Old Texts* aims to “disrupt established cartographic paradigms” (11), by offering both innovative analytical methods and new applications of digital tools.

The heart of this volume is three papers based on the Hestia project (Part II, chapters 7-9), a multi-disciplinary endeavor to create digital tools for spatial analysis of literary sources. The PIs of that project (also this volume’s editors), recognize the potential of literary descriptions “to reveal radically different perspectives on geographical space based on human topologies and linkages rather than natural topography” (157). This volume brings together a number of recent studies that employ “the twin principles of close literary analysis and experimentation with new digital resources” (15), primarily network, analysis, which emphasizes notes of interaction over distance and topography.

The thread that connects most of the papers is Herodotus’ *Histories*. Part I (“Texts, Maps, Ideas: Ancient Greek Representations of Space”) provides useful background to the multiple layers of geographical description encountered in *The Histories* and the Herodotean epistemology of space. Oliver Thomas, Donald Murray, and Paola Ceccarelli (chapters 1–3) situate Herodotus’ world view within his experience and knowledge, respectively exploring the influence of the

Homeric Hymns, the rhetoric of Achaemenid geographical domination, and the place of the Aegean, a “space [that] is neither homogenous nor blank” (61).

Mathieu de Bakker and Tim Rood (chapters 4 and 5) underscore an essential point of this volume: the inadequacy of modern cartographic methods for spatial analysis of ancient historians. De Bakker introduces Herodotus’ varying approach to geographical description, from the hodological to the ‘Olympian’. The challenge for scholars is that Herodotus’ ‘purely verbal topography’ does not commit to a singular epistemology, acknowledging—implicitly or explicitly—the limitations of his knowledge (99). Rood (chapter 5) complicates matters further arguing that, while the hodological perspective is justified to an extent, it fails to capture ancient authors’ more complex, anthropologically-based constructions of space (104–105), in particular, the correlation of space with time. Both Thucydides and Herodotus appear to use spatio-temporal patterning to assert that those living in more remote areas are less culturally developed. Rood argues, however, that Herodotus is more concerned with “variety among present customs rather than to reduce those customs to a single antecedent” (117). In the final chapter of Part I, Stevens provides a glimpse of what Hellenistic conceptions of space may have to offer. Arguing that from Aristotle to Theophrastus we can trace “a transition from the ‘Herodotean’ to a ‘Hellenistic’ eastern geography” (123–124).

In the three chapters (7–9) dedicated to the Hestia project, the authors present their work as a model for future inquiries. Chapters 7 and 9 outline the analytical possibilities that Hestia presents, using Book 5 of the *Histories* as a case study, while chapter 8 presents the technical work supporting the project, including text mining, geodatabases, and network modeling (for additional tools developed by Hestia, particularly the visualization platform HestiaV is, readers should visit: <http://hestia.open.ac.uk/>). Stefan Bouzarovski and Elton Barker (chapter 7) model the application of network analysis. Identifying the nature of spatial relations in Book 5 through hodological (human movement through space) and topokinetic (the understanding that movement is dynamic) lenses, they produce a series of network diagrams (fig. 7.1-5) based on qualitative relationships between places: perceived proximity, movement (to, from, and through), and interventions that are classified as either stationary or mobile. The results provide rich fodder for inquiry and analysis. For example, Sparta’s network indicates not only her intervention at Athens, but also potential resistance from states in the Greek west (fig. 7.4). Given the context of Book 5 on the eve of the

Persian Wars, these questions can reveal a more dynamic political situation than the traditional divide between East and West.

In chapter 9, Barker and Christopher Pelling interrogate that divide, stressing that close analysis, both textual and visual, reveals links that cut across East and West. Perhaps more importantly, chapter 9 reminds readers that cultural geography is based in both *space* and *time*, and thus *memory* is a critical concept for constructing a world view (229). Herodotus puts us on “a meandering path that leads us through a series of overlapping and increasingly complex networks to depict a world in flux, [that] challenges the notion of an abstract, mappable topography” (252).

The volume closes (Part III: “Technologies, Methodologies, Theories: Contemporary Approaches to Mapping Space”) by looking at the application of network theory to material culture, and revisiting key concepts regarding texts and maps. In chapter 10, Tom Brughmans and Jeroen Poblome argue that applying a network approach to the distribution of Roman pottery in the eastern Mediterranean has the potential to explain *why* the distribution map looks the way it does, that is, to explain the decisions actors in that trade made based on their experience of *human* relationships, relationships based on topological rather than topographic considerations. Similarly, the “Tracing Networks” project (chapter 11) seeks to understand cultural contacts across the Mediterranean through a focus on craft production and tradition, and the transmission of that knowledge. The full scope of this program is better understood from the project website: www.tracingnetworks.ac.uk. In chapter 12, Øyvind Eide explores the tension between narrative expression of geographies and visual expressions (i.e., maps) and the difficulty of moving between the two media. He argues that, while the results of going from map to text or text to map may be disappointing, focusing on that *process* makes us attune to the differing contexts and compels us to look beyond topography and ask new questions (318).

In his closing remarks, Christopher Pelling (chapter 13) makes the case for continued experimentation with “alternative cartographies” (322). More importantly, and reassuringly, he reminds us that using digital technologies to explore ancient texts has more value for the reflection and inquiry it compels than the possibility of definitive answers. Underscoring that point, some of the projects included here were not fully realized at the time of printing, stressing the importance of sharing methods more than results. Readers will come to this volume for diverse reasons—Herodotean scholarship, literary criticism, spatial

theory, and/or new “mapping” technologies— and the editors are to be commended for seeing through their initial vision for a volume that brings together various strategies for re-imagining how the ancient Greeks and Romans conceived of their world.

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