

BOOK REVIEW

Anachronism and Antiquity. By TIM ROOD, CAROL ATTACK, AND TOM PHILLIPS. London, UK and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020. Pp. x + 284. Paperback, \$34.95. ISBN: 978-1-350-11520-0.

Ancient texts and modern reception differ about belatedness and precocity when they juxtapose and compare problems past and present. The ancients invented the concept and the word “anachronism” in order to describe something “that appears too early rather than too late,” in their marginal scholia (Chapter 1). For example, Sophocles’ mention of the Pythian Games when Orestes’ tutor reports his charge’s chariot race (*Electra*). Heroes afloat on biremes refer to the Veline Harbor in the *Aeneid*—before Velia had been founded. Asconius, Aulus Gellius and Servius refer to this “anticipatory” event and toponym as “prolepsis.” Ostraka and papyri of the second century CE employ the relevant verb (13), but certain modern Renaissance scholars believe(d) the concept emerged only in the mid-17th century, part of our contemporary amnesia, not in “antiquity’s under-negotiated temporal consciousness” (37). Modernists, however, “ignore at their peril” ancient and Byzantine scholarship about anachronism and its influence on Western Europe (85).

Ricchieri introduced the term to the post-Byzantine scholarly world in a work of 1542 (17). Creative artists such as Strozzi, Fielding and Borges deliberately insert anachronisms in their works. Critics had distinguished this error or literary trope of ana-chronism from meta-chronism--placing an event later than its real date. The authors find an early English example of the former term under the *OED* entry for the latter, in a quotation discussing Biblical chronologies (19). Joseph Scaliger (1598) flourished charges of “anachronism” as he corrected ancient and post-medieval annalists’ errors and synchronisms.

The modern dominant usage, traced back to 18th-century Giambattista Vico, refers to “attitudes and practices ... deemed obsolete.” Historians fall prey to anachronism when they study the distant past while retrojecting unexamined presumptions of their present (28). Nietzsche doubted that we could escape present assumptions about the pagan ancient world. His positivist adversary

Wilamowitz agreed (drinking the “blood of Hades’ ghosts;” cf. 222). This “policing the borders” (31) between modernity and its remote predecessors posits a rupture in historical consciousness.

Did ancient men have an idea of progress or did they imagine that the human condition and landscape remain unchanging (Chapter 2)? Is uniqueness or similarity the essential fabric for historians? Thucydides may be cited for both views: advances in technology (archaic, i.e., anachronistic, weapons survivals on the periphery) and continuity in human nature. Indeed, the authors assert that “All histories are anachronistic,” both a strong claim and a truism.

Greek Lucian and Roman Lucan both manipulated this bi-focality, long before Petrarch wrote a letter to Livy (40-1), and before Lorenzo Valla argued in the 15th century that the Donation of Constantine was a rogue’s forgery.¹ Conscious anachronism, nevertheless, predates any Renaissance (re-)discovery of it. Renaissance writers re-invented it, aware that their epoch came after a long breach with antiquity. They invented the remote pastness of the past. In Albrecht Altdorfer’s painting *The Battle at Issus* (1529), the authors discover intentional propagandistic anachronisms, visual and verbal references to this painter’s Hapsburg patron and to Ottoman dress on Alexander’s Persian opponents (49). The authors consider various German philosophical interpretations of the painting’s visual “gestures.” A desire for accurate clothing on figures of past epochs can only follow opportunities to observe that garb, even if only on excavated Roman statues. An out-of-time clock chiming in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* (I.ii: “The clock has stricken three”) strikes the historically minded critic as an anachronism, fifteen hundred years too early, but that judgment itself may be anachronistic for Shakespeare’s imaginary.²

So, there are temporal errors and intended disjunctions of persons and places, such as Vergil’s epochal breach, infamous from antiquity on, regarding the bizarre conjunction of Trojan War hero Aeneas and Dido, founder and queen of Carthage several centuries later.³ Vergil mixed legends of Bronze Age prehistory

¹ Probably created to deceive the illiterate Pepin the Short, this 8th-century document clumsily masqueraded as a 4th-century “gift” of territory, complete with anachronisms that rewrite the past employing later vocabulary, events and ideas.

² Cleopatra wants to play billiards with the eunuch Mardian (A&C II.v). This anachronism (indoor pool-tables are not much older than Shakespeare himself) provides an anachronism enabling bawdry anent a stick directing balls into pockets.

³ The seventh summer of wandering persists both before and after Aeneas’ visit to Carthage, despite a winter there in between (92). Is this deliberate anachronism or Vergil nodding?

with Iron Age implements and inventions. He wanted to Romanize pre-Roman Italy. His temporal incongruities extend unto onomastic anachronism.⁴ He advertises his “spatio-temporal” anachronisms.

Chapter 3 excavates relations between Anachronism and Philology, “a persistent feature of all the ancient literary genres” (60). Aside from possible anachronisms in archaic Hellenic epics themselves, 5th-century red-figured pottery and the tragic poets introduce contemporary objects and institutions into their representations of the Heroic age. A notorious example of early anachronistic ingenuity is the alleged Athenian interpolation of one verse into the Iliadic Catalogue regarding the camp of the Salaminians (*Il.* 2.557-8, p. 67). Aristotle again discussed it (*Rhet.* 1375b30) and Aristarchus athetized it. Such ancient “land-grabs” introduce anachronators Christopher Logue and Alice Oswald. They favor Bikini isle, astronaut and motorbike similes, in-your-face anachronisms of great poetic energy. Bishop Eustathius, surprisingly, defends such anachronisms (3.785) in the Homeric texts: the poet speaks to his contemporary audience. This “time tension” causes critical anxiety, not only about similes, but also with the ethics of drink, since teachers always used poetry. Drunk characters such as the Cyclops and Penelope’s Suitors enriched Homer’s tales long before Sophocles and Euripides competed (79). School-marm teachers (*Athen.* 1.17ff), however, expressed dissatisfaction with tragic characters throwing piss-pots rather than Homeric Eurymachus’ more seemly ox-hoof. They sidelined the prominence of Dionysus’ Satyrs, impish souses, agents of chaos, in this later Attic dramatic genre.

The Greeks studied time systems, their own and the Egyptian calendar. Their temporal consciousness produced alliances, truces and treaties for ten and thirty years, or forever. Athenians ostracized for ten years, many burgs appointed annual officers and celebrated seasonal festivals annually. Strepsiades’ debts in Aristophanes’ *Clouds* incurred monthly payments—awareness of luni-solar events. Herodotus already mocked Hecataeus’ and other Greeks’ Johnny-come-lately heroic and divine chronologies. He preferred the much longer time-frames explained by Egyptian priests (2.53). Thucydides’ “concealed polemic” targets Hellenicus’ traditional, therefore sloppy method of calculating dates (104). Brasidas attempted to backdate Scione’s revolt for Sparta’s advantage in the Athenian-

⁴Ovid, too, “advertises” Vergil’s intended anachronism in his comic “little *Aeneid*,” addressing directly the nurse Caieta. “When you died, you gave eternal fame to our shores” (*Aen.* 6.900, 7.1-2 and *Met.* 14.156-7, p.72). The later poets know what their long “deceased” mythical characters could not. Servius the anti-anachronator also comments here.

Peloponnesian Treaty of 421. Polybius established accurate synchronisms between the Hellenistic Greek and Roman worlds. Ancient chronographers, such as Dexippus and Eunapius were a dime a dozen, as Jacoby *FGrHist* Part II reveals. Periodizing epochs (including the mythical) varied widely; several floods provided discriminators. Olympiads' more precise and Panhellenic nature advanced their claim. Eclectic Athenaeus too busied himself with archaic poets and their contested dates, and others tangled with sequences of philosophical school-founders.

Joseph Scaliger revived interest in scholarly chronography (Chapter 4), especially those trying to synchronize pagan with Hebrew/Christian date systems. He avoided Tertullian's "polemical anti-paganism" (116), but these authors insist rightly that all chronographers have ideological agendas.

European colonization of the Americas promoted comparative studies in the paradigm of progress from savagery to pastoralism and the "polite" manners of mercantile civilization" (120, Chapter 5), as did railway timetables and factory punch-clocks. New teleological assumptions ("we present the pinnacle of advancement") parallel the implicit criticisms of primitivism in Diodorus and Vitruvius.

Some nations—on Euro-American historians' periphery—were born behind, and other minority populations had been left behind, or felt and feel that way. After explorers and anthropologists' unexpected discoveries of contemporary "backwardness," anachronisms multiplied in Euro-American fictions, both novels and cinema. Survivals are prominent personages in antiquary Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*, Fenimore Cooper's *Mohican Chingachgook* and Edgar Burrough's *Tarzan*. The present authors trace prototypes back at least to Aristophanes' superseded Kronos, Thucydides' barbarians and to Vitruvius' technological explanation of the origins of stone temple features (4.2.2-3). Plutarch's delightful *eti kai nun* ("still today") "footnotes" after visiting touristy Athens and imperial Rome bridge "unexpected survivals" (126-7). A fine visual anachronism (132) describes the deliberate, outmoded Attic pictorial techniques and pre-Eucleidean letters identifying archaized, black-figured Panathenaic amphorae. Satirists like Aristophanes' "Weaker Argument" profess to prefer "the good old days," but with mixed results. Tacitus eulogizes a "golden age," moralizing Germanic primitivism as well as long-gone praiseworthy Roman simplicity (139).⁵ In brief, living

⁵ Yet, Aristotle defends innovation as progress and critiques antiquated practices (*Pol.* 1268b-69a) in medicine, marriage customs, constitutions and law.

anachronisms serve both to praise alleged progress and to condemn the luxury of the present. The past survives in service to the ethical questions of the present (143).

Chapter 6 examines exemplarity, the ancients' idea that past circumstances were similar enough that its notable instances could guide present behavior. Even today, titles proliferate about the "leadership lessons" that Cicero or Marcus Aurelius offers ambitious business-persons, soldiers and sports aspirants—*ceteris* apparently sufficiently *paribus*. The authors believe that concepts of exemplarity and historicism (rupture, change, unrepeatability) can and do co-exist. Thucydides, Plutarch (*Praec.* and the *Lives*) and Tacitus (*Hist.* 3.51) endorse *exempla*, as do philosophers' "achronic political data." They identify this signaling in the "temporal flattening" of Aristotle's *Politics* and in conscious anachronisms of Plato's Socratic settings (158, 167, 206). Herodotus' minority viewpoint, to the contrary, emphasizes (1.5.3-4, 9.27.4) the lability of cities' powers, men's characters and fragile memories. No "Golden Age" for them.

The penultimate chapter articulates a synoptic concept of multi-temporality, anticipated by Calchas, Homer's augur who "knew what is, what will be, and what was before" (180). One period can "fold" into another. A "now" can refer either to a particular moment or any moment perceived as special (e.g., the *nunc* of Horace's *carpe diem* lyric). Homer's Odysseus chats with long-dead comrades in Hades, while Vergil's Aeneas, a tourist in a time-conflated Underworld, alludes to sinners suffering penalties for crimes committed a millennium in the future (197). Thus, "Anchises' foresight extends to knowledge of how a past that lies in his future will be idealized in hindsight" (198).

The last chapter starts from Raphael's ca. 1510 painting long since entitled "The School of Athens." All the figures identified never could have assembled together. Raphael portrays a transcendent intellectual, philosophical community in asynchronous, anachronismal time. The Otherworld, "the ultimate anachronistic community," provides authors in many genres with a template to present together men and women born centuries apart. This move seems problematic to me, since age and time lose meaning for the dead—they cavort and converse indefinitely. They leave behind past, present and future. At best, they experience a different anachronism, call it "achronism." Here, Aristophanes' Aeschylus and Euripides agonize over Athens' crises, while Lucian's celebrities resolve literary issues for catabatic visitors. Examples unfamiliar to me populate these pages.

This impressive monograph demands deep familiarity with all periods of ancient cultures. Robust temporal zig-zagging already sprouted in the first Hellenic texts' pro- and ana-lepses. But heroic late antique and Byzantine scholarship shaped European Renaissance learning (85). The authors situate in brief parentheses many references to obscure scholiasts, forgotten chronographers and minor personages of little-known myths, but antiquity and modernity (after Gutenberg, generally) jostle each other. The three authors offer a "Prelude" on Solon and Croesus, three "Interludes" ("Dido versus Virgil," "Ariadne on Naxos" and "Aeneas in the Underworld"), and an "Epilogue" on Irishman James Barry's astoundingly anachronistic painting (1777-1783), "Crowning the Victors at Olympia."

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