
This book contains thirteen chapters on ancient prose-texts, ranging in time from the sixth century BC until the sixth century AD, about half of which have been published before. Herodotus, represented by seven chapters, clearly is the most central prose text, followed by the ancient novel, both Greek and Latin (four chapters). The chapters offer a combination of close reading (stylistic or literary), discussion of Nachleben in antiquity, comparatistic analysis (mainly of motifs, both in other classical texts but also in non-classical texts), and discussion of sources and historical context. This wide casting of the net has both advantages and disadvantages: a reader using, e.g., the chapter on the Cleobis and Biton-story in Herodotus Book 1 will end up with a mass of information on about every aspect of this story, including the pictorial record. The disadvantage is that at times there is a certain lack of focus: what exactly is the message the author, C.W. Müller (M.), wants to get across in this and his other interpretations of pieces of ancient prose texts?

Reading through the whole book it would seem that one of his interests is the genre of the novella, an intermediate form between myth and historiography. The question here of course is whether there exists a genre of the novella in antiquity, a point discussed by M. on pp. 52-4. Admitting that the labels ‘novella’ and ‘legend’ are anachronistic and imported from literature of later times into ancient scholarship, he decides to use them all the same. His working definition runs as follows: “mit ‘Legende’ und ‘Novelle’ sind im Folgenden Prosaerzählungen beschränkten Umfangs mit einem aussergewöhnlichen Inhalt und einer in sich abgeschlossenen Handlung gemeint, die, historisch-fiktional, in einem geographisch identifizierbaren, lebensweltlichen Kontext angesiedelt sind” (p. 53). He differentiates between legend, where gods play a role and which centre on the lives of persons, and novella, where the divine is absent and the events take place in an everyday setting. The use of the term ‘novella’ for certain parts of Herodotus’ work is well-established, especially among German scholars (see, e.g., H. Erbse’s *Studien zum Verständnis Herodots* from 1992), who all seem to be influenced by a tiny brochure called *Das Zeitalter der Novelle in Hellas* by B. Erdmannsdörffer from 1870. Although I am still not convinced about the legitimacy or strict necessity of this category for Herodotus, it may be useful as a label for certain rounded-off,

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symmetrically built, highly scenic passages, such as the stories of the wife of Masistes or Gyges and Candaules. But the Cleobis and Biton-story, considered a legend by M., already displays a very different narrative form, containing no direct speech and following a simple linear rather than a symmetrical form. Moreover, the most problematic part of the novella concept is that it is associated with fictionality.

M.’s reasoning on this point is somewhat convoluted: though Hecataeus and Herodotus claim to write historiography, in fact their proceedings are those of fictional authors, i.e. they fill up gaps in their narrative with novelistic stories and construct these stories according to narrative patterns which are also found in other stories. In my view this is the wrong way to look at Herodotus’ *Histories*: 1) there is no indication whatsoever that he made a distinction between historical and fictional parts, and 2) the structuring of historical narrative according to recurrent patterns is, as has been amply shown by Hayden White, a characteristic of all historiography. My view in this matter is that, inspired by Homer, ancient historians from beginning to end, allowed themselves a considerable amount of freedom in reconstructing the past, but were always serious in their intention to give a truthful version. The truth simply included more than we would allow for nowadays. Indeed, M. himself does not always seem to be consistent on this point, in that in his discussion of, e.g., the ‘legend’ about Cleobis and Biton he concludes (p. 67) that we are dealing with historical figures and a historical event.

The close readings of M. are usually careful and attentive to small details and hence have much to offer. They are easily readable, though the presentation of the texts under discussion is somewhat erratic and not always helpful: sometimes a text passage is translated (without the original being quoted), sometimes a mere sentence is quoted in the original in a footnote, but quite often the text is not given in any form at all. In the case of a well-known text like Herodotus this is no problem, but as soon as M. turns to Pherecydes, Hecataeus, or more obscure versions of a story from later times the reader would have benefited from a more liberal inclusion of texts. Likewise, an index and bibliography would have greatly increased the accessibility of the—rich—information contained in this book.

One of the most fruitful chapters is the first one, on the beginnings of Greek prose style. Here M. has much to offer on the point of the stylistic analysis of authors such as Pherecydes and Hecataeus, continuing the work of E. Fraenkel, *Dichtung und Philosophie des frühen Griechentums* from 1948, and running parallel with R. Fowler’s work, *Herodotus and his Contemporaries* in JHS 1996. What does it mean when people start to turn from poetry and metre and by-and-large oral composition to the free style of prose, written down from the start? M. has himself much to offer here, but hardly engages with the mass of scholarship which