

Alexandra Lianeri, ed., *The Western Time of Ancient History: Historiographical Encounters with the Greek and Roman Pasts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Pp. 356. ISBN: 978-0-521-88313-9. \$99.00.

This collection of sixteen essays (including the sizable introduction) by eminent classicists and historians regarding the Western historiography of ancient Greece and Rome should be of interest to some specialists. Unfortunately, it will have difficulty attracting a wider readership because of its narrow geographical and chronological scope, repetitive nature, and often esoteric style.

To the authors, “the West” apparently consists almost exclusively of Herodotus, Thucydides, Renaissance Italy, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain, France, and Germany, and Arnaldo Momigliano. Readers searching for information regarding the reception of classical historical works in other times and places in Europe and the Americas will be disappointed. No ancient historian who followed Thucydides (except, oddly enough, Sulpicius Severus) receives a systematic treatment. Xenophon, Polybius, Sallust, Livy, Tacitus, Suetonius, and Plutarch are all mentioned in passing but are the neglected stepsisters at this ball. Although the Romans are not excluded, the Greeks are heavily privileged in discussions of both the historians themselves and their reception in subsequent eras. Much greater emphasis is placed on the philosophy of history than on a delineation of the history of historical writing concerning Greece and Rome. In other words, the book is written for specialists, and for specialists alone.

While the most common complaint about essay collections is that they are insufficiently cohesive, this collection possesses the opposite problem. The authors’ discourses concerning exemplarity versus historicity, universal history, the succession of empires, and the ubiquitous Momigliano, though occasionally interesting, traverse the same ground repeatedly. While some of the essays are quite lucid, even these are generally lacking in the background information that a general reader would require, and too many others are written in a dry, esoteric style calculated to appeal only to specialists. One example of this phenomenon is Lianeri’s verbose introduction, which is enlivened only at the end by her recognition that her intense desire to condemn European imperialism is based on a universalist system of ethics that contradicts her equally powerful penchant for moral relativism. But Lianeri offers no solution to this dilemma, since she is unwilling to surrender either part of this equation and is unable to reconcile them with one another. As a result, the conclusion to her lengthy discourse is refreshingly honest but largely unhelpful—a sad but fitting end to a frustrating essay.

Despite the volume’s flaws, it is not devoid of insights that will interest some specialists. François Hartog’s distinctions between the ancients, for whom the past provided authority, progressive eighteenth-century Europeans, for whom the (imagined) future furnished authority, and today’s post-modern Westerners, for whom the present possesses authority, are intriguing. Several essays touch interestingly on the almost inevitable process by which Westerners went from idealizing Greece to studying it to uncovering its less edifying and more alien characteristics—in other words, the process

of transitioning from a focus on exemplarity to an emphasis on historicity. Kostas Vlassopoulos summarizes the three principal Western views of ancient Greece: 1. As fundamentally different from the modern West, with virtually no connection between the two. 2. As not a single culture but various cultures at different stages of development, stages comparable to those experienced by the modern West (Vico's view). 3. As an early stage of Western evolutionary development and, thus, as the foundation of Western civilization. Vlassopoulos notes correctly that these approaches were not mutually exclusive. Rosalind Thomas demonstrates that it was Thucydides' immortal passages on plague and civil war, two internal matters, rather than his narrative of the Peloponnesian War itself, that made his reputation as a historian, a great irony considering that he is often designated the founder of the Western historiographical obsession with war. Jonas Grethlein notes that while Herodotus did not subscribe to the cyclical view of history later made famous by Thucydides, he differed from most modern historians in his emphasis on chance, a crucial difference that prevented him from presaging the modern progressive view. Ellen O'Gorman quotes Karl Marx on the ironic nature of revolutionary psychology: "Just when they appear to be revolutionizing themselves and their circumstances, in creating something unprecedented, in just such epochs of revolutionary crisis, that is when they nervously summon up the spirits of the past, borrowing from them their names, marching orders, uniforms in order to enact new scenes in world history, but in this time-honored guise and with this borrowed language" (p. 267). Marx was referring to the French revolutionaries, but his thesis applies equally to the American rebels.

In short, this volume provides some interesting insights for specialists of Greek and (to a much lesser extent) Roman historiography in Renaissance Italy and eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain, France, and Germany. But its flaws preclude a wider audience.

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