ANCIENT SPACE BEYOND MAPS

BARKER (E.), BOUZAROVSKI (S.), PELLING (C.), ISAKSEN (L.) (edd.) *New Worlds from Old Texts. Revisiting Ancient Space and Place*. Pp. xviii + 385, figs, ills, maps. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. Cased, £85, US$135. ISBN: 978-0-19-966413-9.

The present volume derives from a series of papers presented at Oxford in 2009 focusing on novel methodologies for understanding and representing ancient conceptions of space. Contributors are drawn from history, archaeology, geography and digital humanities, providing a well-rounded, multi-disciplinary approach to the topic. Thirteen chapters are divided into three sections covering a range of material and methodologies aimed not just at students of ancient history, but at the wider humanities and social sciences research communities. In the last four decades the ‘spatial turn’ and networking approaches in the humanities have received increased interest. This volume contributes to this *zeitgeist* by addressing these theoretical categories with particular emphasis on the work of Herodotus, principally his criticism of ancient mapping and his perspective of space as hodological and ‘lived’ (pp. 4–5). Nevertheless, the volume’s scope ranges far beyond the *Histories*, addressing a wide range of literary and material evidence through equally diverse methodologies; particularly the role of digital humanities in opening up new research directions that go beyond modern Cartesian notions to illuminate ancient conceptions of space.

In Part 1, O. Thomas analyses space in Ancient Greek Hymn, focusing on the intersection between overlapping divine, performative and narrative frames in creating a connection between deity, space and performance context (pp. 25–46). This provides a framework to compare the role of Delos in Herodotus and in the Homeric and Callimachean Hymns to Apollo, concluding that it facilitates an understanding of the implicit spatial context of the island as ‘central’ (p. 42). While providing an interesting insight into an under-utilised genre, Thomas’ line of argument is difficult to follow and does not place enough emphasis on performance context, which might have provided a more nuanced spatial analysis. Next is the late D. Murray’s fascinating chapter on eastern universal spatial conceptions (pp. 47–60). Murray presents an original thesis which is well grounded in the source material, and his intriguing suggestion that Herodotus, probably unknowingly, recognises the importance of universal kingship in the east (p. 58), sheds new light on the oft-debated Scythian and Egyptian *logoi*. P. Ceccarelli (pp. 61-80) focuses on the representation of the Aegean in authors ranging from Anaximander (pp. 64–6) through Hecataeus (pp. 66–71) to Herodotus (pp. 73–9) and Aeschylus (pp. 71–3). She ably demonstrates a multiplicity of representation; whether blank, as middle ground or as an area of fluidity viewed as Greek or Eastern depending on the focalisation of the interlocutor. M. de Bakker’s paper (pp. 81–99) approaches Herodotus’ derision of mapmakers’ over-schematic efforts as a way of underlining his conception of the changeability of space. One wonders whether De Bakker’s take on Herodotus’ ‘laughter’ as a rhetorical device could be developed, for example we might see something similar in Herodotus’ treatment of Hecataeus in the Egyptian *logos* (2.143). There may also be grounds for comparison with the introduction to Hecataeus’ *Genealogies* where the stories of the Greeks are called “many and laughable” (F1a). T. Rood looks at the use of space and time in Thucydides and Herodotus (pp. 101–20). He demonstrates how Thucydides’ conception of space-time is gradually broken down during the narrative; from primitive peoples in a state of timeless antiquity which Athens and Sparta descend to in the brutality of war (pp. 110–1). Rood’s discussion of Herodotus, however, is disappointingly limited, as it provides little comparanda beyond dissimilarity. K. Stevens then assesses the development of geographic knowledge in the Hellenistic age through the texts of Aristotle’s *Historia Animalium* and Theophrastus’ *Historia Plantarum* (pp. 121–52). By mapping out geographical references, she establishes that, while the extremities of geographic scope are similar, a changed geo-political climate allows Theophrastus to ‘fill in’ significant gaps in knowledge. Stevens provides an important articulation of the link between political and intellectual development, offering a good basis for accepting her assertion that Aristotle’s work was not influenced by Alexander’s conquests. This chapter also demonstrates, somewhat against the volume’s goal, that traditional maps may be effective in illuminating certain aspects of ancient spatial awareness.

Part 2 focuses on the conception, functioning and results of the Open University’s *Hestia* project. First, S. Bouzarovski and E. Barker (pp. 155–79) outline the methodology and application of network modelling to Herodotus’ fifth book, categorising relationships between entities based on their relative positions, movement and transformation. The results of this analysis do not outwardly appear to contribute much to our understanding of Herodotus’ spatial conception. The resultant major network nodes of Persia and Miletus, Sparta and Athens could potentially be predicted even without such plotting, as C. Pelling adroitly notes in the volume’s final chapter (p. 320). Additionally, the accompanying graphs (particularly figs 7.1 [p. 168] and 7.5 [p. 177]) are too small to make out much more than these major connections, and the reader is recommended to refer to their digital versions. Nonetheless, these shortcomings are acknowledged (p. 9), and the potential to expand this methodology to other passages and authors marks this chapter as a useful introduction. Subsequently, Barker, L. Isaksson and J. Ogden focus on how the *Hestia* project seeks to go beyond a basic close reading of the material (pp. 181–224). They outline *Hestia*’s methodology and the various digital techniques used to present Herodotus’ geographic data in dynamic visualisations. Barker and Pelling then return to Book 5 (pp. 225–52), reflecting on how Herodotus uses focalisation in movement and memory to underline the fluidity and contingency of spatial relations. It is unfortunate that the process of extracting this analysis from the visualisation of the datasets, as set out in the previous chapter, is absent. The reader would do well to access the online material which provides a far wider picture of the project than can be accommodated in the limited space of a book, though this reviewer is concerned whether these will remain available at the locations provided in the footnotes given the ever changing nature of the internet.

Part 3 opens with T. Brughams and J. Poblome’s analysis of the spatial distribution of Roman tableware (pp. 255–79). The relatively large temporal disparity between the material studied here and the rest of the volume is somewhat jarring, and the piece’s technical nature renders it especially difficult for the non-specialist. The chapter by the *Tracing Networks* team is an interesting introduction to their varied work, outlining the scope and unity of the various projects and their methodological background (pp. 281–300). The brevity with which the individual projects are addressed reads more like a series of abstracts, and this material would probably have been better served if presented in an edited volume of its own. Ø. Eide then approaches the text/map problem from the perspective of geography and digital humanities (pp. 301–18) and, finally, Pelling completes the volume by looking back over some of the issues raised (pp. 319–36), expressing hope that the methodologies outlined will be used to expand understanding of ancient space in authors and material beyond the book’s scope.

This volume provides a good starting point for those seeking to understand current trends in spatial and digital studies in the ancient world. Likewise, through rigorous exploration of methodological issues, it offers students and researchers an excellent example of the scope and limitations of this kind of research. The reader is explicitly reminded that ‘to make sense of these patterns and to give them value requires close textual analysis’ (p. 9), a recommendation this reviewer wholeheartedly endorses. Nevertheless, the price of the volume is excessively prohibitive and, while researchers may find much of interest in the individual sections, for the general reader the chronological and evidential scope may prove daunting. The volume may be particularly useful for those looking to integrate digital approaches into their own fields as well as providing a framework from which space in other authors and material assemblages may be studied. This volume is thus recommended to students and researchers alike as an excellent example of the potential for inter-disciplinary research and the role of new technologies in opening up new questions and research directions.

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