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Nicoletta Bruno: Archaeologies, Origins, Antiquities

The ten papers assembled in this wide-ranging volume, proceedings of a 2021 conference, address *archaiologiai*, *origins*, and *antiquitates*: ancient narratives, as Nicoletta Bruno puts it in her preface, "centered on the remote and unknown pasts of Greece and Rome" (v). Bruno's ambitious, if at times unwieldy, introduction examines how such narratives "melded the macrocosm of nature" with the microcosm of human and societal development (1), how they interacted with historiography, and how they articulated the emergence of "culture," a term that is nowhere clearly defined in the book. She concludes with careful summaries of each chapter but leaves to the reader the task of drawing meaningful connections among them.

The chapters are arranged chronologically. The first three, which focus on the Greek world, set a high bar for clarity of argument and style. Tim Rood's "Cultural History and Homeric Scholarship in Thucydides' *Archaeology*" is one of the book's standouts, an example of how close philological work can productively supplement intellectual history. Rood shows that Thucydides' comparison of early Athenian sartorial refinement with Spartan austerity and nudity (1.6.3-6) stands apart from the trajectory of growth articulated by the *Archaeology* as a whole (1.2-19). Interpretations that dismiss this passage as a schematic representation of cultural progress, Rood argues, reflect Enlightenment models rather than Thucydides' own historiographical aims. Thucydides' "cultural history" is, in fact, a calibrated exercise in historical distancing, which relies on the exegetical techniques of Homeric scholarship to create perspective through contrast.

In "Archäologie als Argument," Michael Erler argues that Plato's narratives of antiquity do not simply recount the past but reflect on the function of historical narratives in philosophical discourse. Through close readings of *Hippias Maior*, *Politikos*, *Nomoi*, and *Timaios*, Erler shows that Plato's "philosophisch konnotierte historische Erzählweise" serves teleologic and didactic aims while offering a hermeneutic key to Plato's practice (56): for Plato, philosophy is the "*conditio sine qua non*" that renders ancient history worth narrating at all.

Antonio Iacoviello asks how non-honorific decrees in the Hellenistic period could "function as, or convey, a community's *archaiologia*" (71). Focusing on the republication of Classical decrees at Iasos and Troizen and anti-tyranny legislation at Eretria and Eresos, Iacoviello demonstrates that communities constructed civic identity through selective, often Athenocentric, appropriations of the past: an example, he suggests, of what John Ma has recently called the "Great Convergence." [1] The chapter compellingly expands the volume's scope beyond literary texts, although the claim that a single paradigmatic episode from the late Archaic period can constitute *archaiologia* risks stretching the term beyond the point of usefulness.

The Roman chapters continue to explore *archaiologia* as a tool for evaluating contemporary concerns but do so with greater unevenness. Nicoletta Bruno reads the historical introduction to Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae* (6-13) as the moral and philosophical foundation of the monograph as a whole, suggesting that Sallust deliberately adopts aspects of epideictic oratory to construct a teleological narrative of Rome's rise and decline. Bruno's analysis of Sallust's moral vocabulary and philosophical framework is insightful, although the organization of the chapter leads to some thematic repetition.

Irene Leonardis compares Dicaearchus's lifestyle-based cultural history (as outlined in the lost *Bios Hellados*) with Varro's reinterpretation of it as a genealogical account of human, specifically Roman, development. She suggests that Roman cultural anthropology and Platonic philosophy, perhaps mediated by Antiochus of Ascalon, influenced this shift. While the connection to Plato may require further substantiation, Leonardis's philological analysis is

illuminating, particularly her discussion of the spatial metaphors implied by the verbs *descendere* and *procedere* (139).

Bruno's second contribution compares Lucretius and Seneca as authors of universal histories that decenter humanity in favor of nature and the cosmos. Despite their different orientations - Lucretius's non-teleological materialism, which uses myth to "illustrate the repetitive patterns of human behavior" (153), versus Seneca's providential Stoicism, which subordinates historiography to natural history and moral philosophy - both writers privilege philosophy over narrative history to make sense of the human past.

Christopher Star offers a sophisticated reading of Vergil's engagement with "the question of early history," which he regards as "one of the most creative and complex" (180). By analyzing passages across the corpus (including the songs of Silenus in *Eclogue* 6 and Iopas in *Aeneid* 1), he shows how Vergil juxtaposes competing myths of decline and progress while exposing the artifice and ultimate unknowability of the past-Vergil assigns nearly all accounts of early history, Star notes, to internal narrators. Taken together, these strategies depict a movement from "ecumenicalism" to "nationalism" (196).

Sergio Brillante's chapter shifts focus to the sociology of cultural transmission, arguing that the family was an "autentico vettore" (199) for conveying cultural heritage: texts, as well as practices, stories, and objects. Families, he contends, served as private libraries, preserving, continuing, controlling, and curating literary production, and they thereby played a decisive role in shaping the medieval manuscript tradition. Brillante draws on an impressively wide range of sources, although he treats most of them as equally authoritative.

Stella Alekou's chapter on rape imagery in the *Metamorphoses* argues that Ovid exposes rather than glorifies or aestheticizes sexual violence. Her readings of individual episodes are insightful, as is her incorporation of Roman law. While Alekou frames these myths as foundational, explaining Roman cultural attitudes toward women, she engages only intermittently with questions of origins, and the chapter thus sits somewhat uneasily within the collection as a whole.

The volume concludes with Marco Formisano's nuanced reading of the 4th-century *Origo gentis Romanae*. Taking as a starting point Marc Bloch's critique of the "idol of origins" (250) and Édouard Glissant's opposition of "relation" to "filiation" (251), Formisano suggests that the text's "discourse of forgery" (255), "conceptual instability" (256), and etymological play (260) transform it from an antiquarian repository into a self-undermining reflection on origins themselves. As a final chapter, Formisano's essay productively redirects attention from the uses of origin stories to their fragility as an explanatory category.

The volume's contributions vary considerably in quality, scope, and method. Stronger editorial intervention from the press would have mitigated the stylistic awkwardness and structural weaknesses of certain chapters. Specialists in ancient historiography, cultural memory, and intellectual history will nevertheless find much of interest here. At its best, the collection shows that *archaiologiai* functioned not merely as antiquarian exercises but as tools for cultural self-definition and philosophical reflection: ancient engagements with the remote past were about negotiating present concerns as much as historical beginnings.

Note :

[1] John Ma: *Polis. A New History of the Ancient Greek City-State from the Early Iron Age to the End of Antiquity*, Princeton 2024.